

## April 7, 2024 Shared Ministry Service – First Church Salem Unitarian Universalist

**Prelude** - Michael

**Welcome** - Deb Greel

**Announcements** – Deb Greel

**Call to Worship / Bell** – by Erica Hewitt – Rev. Jenny Rankin

As we enter into worship, put away the pressures of the world that ask us to perform,  
To take up masks, to put on brave fronts. Silence the voices that ask you to be perfect.  
This is a community of compassion and welcome.

You do not have to do anything to earn the love contained within these walls.

You do not have to be braver, smarter, stronger, or better than you are at this moment to belong here with us.

You only have to bring the gift of your body, no matter how able; your seeking mind, no matter how busy; your animal heart, no matter how broken.

Bring all that you are and all that you love to this hour together.

Come, let us worship together.

Please join in the singing of Hymn 323 as you are able.

**Opening Hymn** – 323 Break Not the Circle

**Covenant** – Eric Kenney

**Community Greeting Each Other** – Eric Kenney

**Chalice Lighting** – Melody Lee

(Put chalice front and center in the sanctuary)

***Shared Light, Shared Future*** by Josh, Prudence, & Percival Robern

*This chalice lighting was written by two young children and their parent.*

We are all flames.

When we gather hand in hand,

Our church, our community, our home,

We inspire,

We celebrate,

We come together

Sharing our light of hope,

For our shared future.

**Responsive Reading** - Hymnal #728 John Buehrens – Eric Kenney

Blessed are those who yearn for deepening  
more than escape;

who are not afraid to grow in spirit.

*Blessed are those who take seriously  
the bonds of community; who regularly join  
in celebration and learning, who come as much  
to minister as to be ministered unto.*

Blessed are those who bring their children;  
who invite their friends to come along,  
to join in fellowship, service, learning, and growth.

*Blessed are those who support the church  
and its work by their regular, sustained,*

*and generous giving; and who give of themselves  
no less than their money.*

Blessed are those who know that the church is often imperfect, yet rather than harbor feelings of anger or disappointment, bring their concerns and needs to the attention of the church leaders.

*Blessed are those who when asked to serve, do it gladly; who realize that change is brought about through human meeting, who do the work of committees, and stay till the end.*

Blessed are those who speak their minds in meetings, who can take and give criticism; who keep alive their sense of humor.

*Blessed are those who know that the work of the church is the transformation of society; who have a vision of Beloved Community transcending the present, and who do not shrink from controversy, sacrifice, or change.*

**All:** Blessed are they indeed.

**Time for All Ages** – Theo Burbank

**Singing Young People to Class**

**Stewardship Moment** – Deb Greel

**Reading** – Jerrie Hildebrand

*The Light of the Lighthouse* by Ahmed Khan

In a coastal village, by the sea so wide,  
Stands a lighthouse, the villagers' pride.  
A beacon of hope in the darkest of nights,  
Guiding sailors' home through perilous plights.

The keeper, an old man with eyes like the tide,  
Whispers tales of the sea, deep and wide.  
But when storms rage and waves crash with might,  
It's the village that gathers, to keep the light bright.

Each hand plays a part in this dance of fate,  
To protect their kin from a watery grave.  
In solidarity, they find strength anew,  
In the lighthouse's glow, their bond grew.

**Reflection** - Jerrie Hildebrand

There were no lighthouses along the edge of the Susquehanna River in the upper portion of the northern region of Appalachia where I grew up. I first saw one when I visited my maternal grandfather and wife in Hampton, Virginia, at the age of seven. Old Point Comfort Lighthouse welcomed those navigating into Hampton Roads Harbor, where the James, Nansemond, and Elizabeth Rivers converge. Later in life, as a wife of both a naval and then civilian sailor, I found my world surrounded by these majestic and sometimes small guiding beacons of light physically and spiritually. Lighthouses became places I would walk, run, and drive to sit next to, cry at the base of, or sit and meditate on what I needed to do to shift something that was not going well or offer gratitude. Today, I officiate many weddings next to or near them. Little did this

person from the hills and green valleys realize the symbol they would become, physically, psychologically, and ontologically, in my business, personal, and spiritual life.

Lighthouses, like churches, are managed by a person who guides specific aspects of their workings. Over time, I have learned that for the beacon to stay lit, the surrounding community or particular organizations commit their time and service to their upkeep, have fundraisers to keep things operational, gardeners to keep the grounds beautiful, and so on. The task of caring for the lights to stay on requires a community.

Tandi Rogers, a UU minister and the Director of the Spiritual Direction Formation & Certification at Meadville Lombard Theological School, wrote an article called “What Color Is Your Ministry Light.” It is for UU organizational and congregational leadership, members, and ministers to look at the “light” in the ministries, the group, or the congregation. What I found fascinating was her use of red, green, yellow, and white colors, like those used by lighthouses and, of course, moving traffic.

From what I see as a member of the Transition Team, we are moving from the red zone to the yellow zone. We halted, reached out for guidance, stopped, and assessed our personal and collective behavioral contributions that led to communication breakdowns and how we relate to one another, leadership, and ministers. We started to evaluate the systems from the past to create more intentional transparency. We have begun empowering new leadership and committee participants – this was red-zone work.

As we enter the yellow zone, this is a time for deliberate, careful, gentle, and organized planning of our structures and how we want to craft them for our church’s future. Like lighthouses, churches in today’s world are at risk. Similarly, like the community groups revitalizing lighthouses, it is a shared ministry model that has other churches thriving. This model is a specific process that supports members in identifying their “gifts for ministry” and empowering them to flourish and contribute to the community. Technically, as businesses, churches can be intentional with these new, specific, clear, and meaningful tools, structures, and processes.

We have always done a form of shared ministry, and now, with new tools, we can create more success in managing the gifts, just like there are new tools for ships to navigate the waters. Like a boat captain, if the minister has no course charted by their team, there is nothing to guide, and the boat or church goes off course. The crafting of the structures is the map and light that pulls our choices and work forward. Creating this is our role and is part of what defines congregational polity. The minister guides us in what WE invent as a partner in our shared ministry.

Almost every religion operates inside shared ministry models from the prophets of the world’s religions. Jesus had twelve disciples in Christianity, Mohammed had ten companions, Buddha had ten disciples, and many ancient gods and goddesses had adherents who could be said to be disciples. The disciples’ primary job was to go out and share the messages, and the messages to the followers were basically to go out, give aid, serve others, and share the words of the prophets. Some circles see this as the beginning of shared ministry. One of the definitions in the dictionary for ministry is how someone gives aid and serves others, and it seems to be the original thought behind ministry from the vantage point of the early prophets.

In the book *New Life Through Shared Ministry: Moving from Volunteering to Mission*, Judith A. Urban describes shared ministry as intentionally creating beyond what we call volunteerism in regular non-profit businesses today. Volunteerism relies on participants answering an invitation. Shared ministry is aware of the participants’ gifts and organizes to empower the gifts and organization to flourish.

The term shared ministry refers to how each congregation member contributes their gifts in service to the faith and the broader community. This is how we each minister: giving aid and serving others. The shared ministry has specific characteristics as a concept and a management system.

In concept, church members are invited to share their gifts, energy, and passions to support, serve, aid, and contribute aside from money to steward its vision. When leadership has identified gifts and matched them to organizational opportunities, it can encourage and empower them. This allows for the joy and projects, large and small, to get done. It enables us to assess what is needed and how things are at specific intervals for adjustments to reach the goals. It is intended to empower participation, welcome the community from beyond our walls, and create more fun with one another. And who wouldn't like some more fun?!?!?

I am grateful I discovered the symbology of the beacon of the lighthouse. The meandering river as a symbol would have left me feeling unintentional in life. I would not have gotten out of horrible circumstances nor had the successes I can celebrate today without learning to plan, chart my course, and allow myself to pack up and sail into the unknown. I never would have found my callings, let alone have heard them.

On April 28, during the Transition Team's Dreams and Visioning Gathering after the service, we will start to look at what we would love to envision as possibilities for our community. No idea is out of bounds. We are inviting you to dream and dream big! Visionaries set forth to create big dreams. Like André Gide, the 1947 Nobel Prize in Literature winner, said, "One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a long time." I genuinely feel this is what the founders of this congregation felt as they boarded ships led by big visions, wind in their sails, and embracing the unknown. I trust we will do what we can to create our next journey.

As our congregation starts to envision and chart the course for our future, let us begin to celebrate the work we have done. May we access all the new tools available to us and become the keepers of light that foster the shared Unitarian Universalist values of interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity, justice, and love that guide our collective hearts to a loving and safe harbor.

**Time for Generosity** – Jerrie Hildebrand

**Doxology**

**Meditation and Prayer** – Russell Lane (Russell's Words Followed by Lord's Prayer)

Spirit of life, source of life in all of its various forms, and expressions.

We give thanks this morning for our differences – for the unique gifts that each of us bring to the world, for the unique paths each of us are called to, for the unique understandings each of us have of ourselves and of the world.

We give thanks for this community, where we can each share the gifts and abilities with which we have been blessed, and where we can each receive what others have to share according to our need. We are grateful that, where one may be weak, another may be strong. Where one struggles and is weary, another may help to carry a burden. Where one has a question, another may provide insight. And where one has joy and blessing to share, there are others to share it with.

Help us to see, respect, and celebrate the gifts with which we have been blessed, in ourselves and in others.

Help us to be mindful that both giving and receiving can be acts of love and occasions of grace and blessing.

Help us to renew our commitment to working together to help make life here on earth that much more like heaven.

**The New Zealand Lord's Prayer from The Māori & Polynesia**

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;  
May the way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
Sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trial too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
Now and forever.  
Amen.

**Reflection** – Rev. Jenny Rankin - Reading by Mary Oliver:

“Make of yourself a light,”  
said the Buddha,  
before he died.

I think of this every morning  
as the east begins  
to tear off its many clouds  
of darkness, to send up the first  
signal — a white fan  
streaked with pink and violet,  
even green.

An old man, he lay down  
between two sala trees,  
and he might have said anything,  
knowing it was his final hour.

The light burns upward,  
it thickens and settles over the fields.

Around him, the villagers gathered  
and stretched forward to listen.

Even before the sun itself  
hangs, disattached, in the blue air,

I am touched everywhere  
by its ocean of yellow waves.

No doubt he thought of everything  
that had happened in his difficult life.

And then I feel the sun itself  
as it blazes over the hills,  
like a million flowers on fire —  
clearly I'm not needed,  
yet I feel myself turning  
into something of inexplicable value.

Slowly, beneath the branches,  
he raised his head.  
He looked into the faces of that frightened crowd.

■ Mary Oliver

**Reflection - "Make of yourself a light"**

I thought of this poem one morning this week

As I stood in the sunroom and watched pink and yellow streak across the eastern sky early in the morning.

And I thought of you, turning the corner here in your second interim year, moving to form a search committee. You have worked hard to get to this place and I hope you take a moment to congratulate yourself and celebrate.

I'm grateful to Jerrie Hildebrand and the Transition Team for their leadership today in putting together this worship service, And for their hard work in the past two years.

As the Transition Team moves toward completing its work in June, we're looking at some of the things we have NOT gotten to yet—one is this topic of shared ministry. And that's why we are lifting "shared ministry" up in worship today.

Listening to you, it seems like "shared ministry" has come up again and again as a point of confusion. Even a point of tension, some anxiety.

People said they didn't really know what it meant. They wondered if Elizabeth came in with one understanding of it, and the congregation had another understanding, and that contributed to some of the difficulties that ensued.

As you get ready to form a search committee, write a profile that describes you to ministerial candidates, and start to introduce yourself to them in interviews next year, it will be important for you—the congregation—to be confident that you understand the "shared ministry model." It also seems wise for you to make a definite decision, one way or another, whether you want to use that model.

I'm not here to "sell" you on it! It's one model out there and you the congregation—in conversation with your elected representatives (the Standing Committee) YOU get to decide what model you will use.

In the last 10 years as an interim, I've watched other congregations wrestle with this "shared ministry" concept as well. I want to share with you a few things I've learned.

First, some MYTHS about shared ministry. What it is NOT:

Myth #1: “shared ministry” means the minister asks lay people to do different parts of the Sunday service (the chalice lighting, readings, etc). That is PART of it but far from the whole and not really the point.

Myth #2: “shared ministry” means the minister doesn’t do his or her job but gives it to lay people to do. The minister has less work. (Actually, to be honest, in congregations where shared ministry is working well, things are vital and bustling and busy and there is more work for EVERYONE! Minister and lay people!)

OK that is 2 things it is NOT. So what IS “shared ministry?”

Like Jerrie, I like Judith Urban’s book and like this definition:

*“Shared ministry creates a congregational culture in which each member is invited to participate in ministry and is helped to do so through proven systems and processes. It brings new life and energy to the congregation. Members learn that all people have gifts and all are called to use them in building the reign of God. Shared ministry creates the environment in which this can actually happen.”<sup>1</sup>*

So that’s the definition from a book, but now I’ll try to put it in my own words.

In some ways, it’s not that different from what you are doing now, and have been doing for many years.

- It’s another way to say “volunteering.” You bring food to fellowship, help out in RE, sing in the choir, serve on a committee. You decorate, cook, paint, clean, balance the books.
- Instead of calling them “volunteer opportunities,” we might call them “ministries of the church.”
- In a shared ministry model, everyone—not just the paid minister or the paid staff—pitches in to make sure it all gets done.
- THAT’S ALREADY HAPPENING HERE.

BUT THERE ARE SOME DIFFERENCES:

#### 1. VISION

Shared ministry starts with a clear vision of who you are as a community and where you want to go. In a more traditional ministry model, the congregation largely looked to the minister to create and set that vision.

In “shared ministry,” the congregation is a full partner in creating the vision—At the drawing board, so to speak, from the get go—

Helping to brainstorm, design and create that vision.

You are going to start that work together on “Blue Sky Sunday (April 28) when Patti Roka leads us in a fun brainstorming event to help you begin to imagine dream.

#### 2. EVALUATION

- And when it comes to evaluation, BOTH partners (minister and congregation) are held accountable.
- So “ministry” is not something that the paid minister does or doesn’t do and gets evaluated on.
- “ministry” is something EVERYONE does or doesn’t do and gets evaluated on.
- Right now, your minister receives a formal performance evaluation each year.
- Under a shared ministry model, YOU would also get a performance evaluation!
- Every 2-3 years, you would do an assessment of ALL the ministries here.
- You would look at religious education, social justice, worship, music, welcoming people, small group ministry ,whatever you are doing—
- You would ask questions like “What is going well? what could we do differently?”

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Urban, *New Life through Shared Ministry*.

- You'd look at data. How many visitors are we getting? How many new families and kids are coming in? how many people are we serving in pastoral care? How big is the choir? What are the attendance numbers in lifespan learning? How many new volunteers are stepping up every year, and how many new committee chairs? What does our pathway from "visitor" to new member look like? And what is the path from "new member" to "becoming a leader?" Do we have a good pipeline for leadership and a healthy succession plan so that leadership positions turn over regularly, we have new people, new blood, new ideas always flowing in
- You, the lay leaders, would decide what metrics you want to measure and how you want to measure them. You would design the "performance evaluation tool" to measure ministry by lay people, the way you currently do for your minister.

I'll be honest: some congregations like the idea of self-assessment and others balk at the idea that their work as volunteers would be evaluated. They are very clear that they only want the minister and paid staff to have performance evaluations (as you do now).

For example, I worked with one congregation with brought in a new minister and after a couple of years, did an extensive evaluation of ALL the ministry (paid and unpaid). However, it was a short and rocky settled ministry and after that, the congregation decided that the minister would get a performance review, but not the congregation.

Other congregations where the ministry partnership was going well had good results with evaluating both congregation and minister.

As I said, it's your decision. And it's a pretty big one you need to make as you prepare to bring in a new settled minister.

If you are really going to do shared ministry, you are going to be doing a thorough self-evaluation of all the ministries here every 2 or 3 years. Are you up for that? Can you really buy into that? If not, probably should not do it.

### 3. NOT FOCUSED ON COMMITTEES BUT ON "GIFTS FOR MINISTRY"

- There's another difference from what you are doing right now. Congregations using a "shared ministry" model have a very specific process in place to help their members reflect on and identify their own personal "gifts for ministry."
- There is an invitation to each person to discover those gifts and then bring them to the wider community.

For example, say you work in finance for your "day job." You've got the skills and experience to be church treasurer, yes. But what you LOVE is making music. That is your "gift for ministry." You decide you'll offer to play the piano in worship or start a children's choir.

- Or you are a lawyer or a librarian but when you get a chance to get your hands in the soil, it lights you up. Gives you joy. You want to be part of the "gardening and green ministry" in a congregation.
- Joy. Shared ministry is about helping people discover where they find joy and figuring out how they might bring that into the life of the church.
- In this model, congregations move away from the old committee model—lots of committees with lots of jobs that need doing.
- Instead, they look at the people they actually have and what lights them up, what gives them joy, and they go from there.
- If you've got a bunch of people who are artists or who love theatre then maybe you embrace that and your church starts a free community theatre program for kids.

THIS IS NOT EASY STUFF



To be honest, helping people figure out their “gifts for ministry” and then constructing actual opportunities for them to practice those gifts within the church in a way that serves the larger vision—this is not easy. It takes a lot of thought, some specific tools and processes.

From what I’ve seen in UU congregations, it’s not something we excel at doing. It’s not easy.

And that’s too bad. Because people come to us looking for purpose and meaning and joy, I think, they come looking for ways to grow spiritually, to exercise their “spirit” in the world,” and we sometimes let them down.

Moving from the “way we’ve always done it” to a new way CAN be done, but it’s not the work of a moment.

#### 4. HIGH EXPECTATION

- I think it can be hard for Unitarian Universalist congregations to actually say that things are expected of you. We don’t want to scare people off, don’t want to be too “prescriptive”
- And yet research shows that “low expectation, low accountability” congregations do not thrive. Just the opposite. We may be critical of megachurches for their theology but we can grudgingly admit they must be doing right with their high expectations and high accountability on participation and pledging.
- It is not a passive “consumer model” where people expect to come and be “served” by paid minister/staff.
- It is an active participation model where the expectation is that everyone will give something to help build the community and make the ministries of the church happen.
- The expectation is that everyone will be trying to give something of themselves and their spirit.
- If you have a “gift for ministry” and it serves the larger vision, that will be welcomed, encouraged and expected.
- You may well ask: “I just want to come on Sunday and sit in the pew and leave. Is that ok? Will I be asked to give something? To do something?”
- That’s a great question. Just bringing your body, your spirit, your presence on Sunday is already a big gift you give a community. For some, that is what they want to give, that’s all they want to give, and that is enough.

I don’t know if this has helped clarify “shared ministry” but I hope so. I welcome your questions and comments.

I’ll be honest.

I think there is more potential here.

There is **latent energy** within this community that could be harnessed.

If you can figure out a way to help people find what gives them joy within this context and live that out in service of your larger collective vision

That could liberate a lot of energy.

See it free.

- “What lights you up? What brings you joy?” When a church is full of people who are doing things they LOVE to do, the people have a sense of being “lighted up” from the inside, a congregation can have a sense of palpable energy and vitality, rather than the weary look of a bunch of people who are “going through the motions.”

Vocation, from the Latin word *vocare* which means “to call.”

To what are we called?

Frederic Buechner, Presbyterian minister and writer once defined “vocation” in this way:

*"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."*

*"Make of yourself a light"*

What if each one of us could become a little bit more of a "light" shining out in the world?

Shining out love

Shining out energy

Shining out goodness

If each of us could make of ourselves a light, and if we joined all our lights together, think what a beacon (dare I say a LIGHTHOUSE) this church could be in the community, in the wider world

Shining out truth, beauty, goodness, justice, for all to see

Encouraging other people out in the community to do that as well.

*"Make of yourself a light."*

May it be so.

**Exercise & Ritual** – Jerrie Hildebrand & Rev. Jenny Rankin

**Blessing of Shared Ministry** – written by Jerrie Hildebrand

**Jenny:** The work of a spiritual community and this congregation is in front of you, behind you, and on

**Jerrie:** At this time, if you are a member of the Standing Committee, Deacons, committee chairs or Transition Team, please come forward and light your candles from ours and spread out around the sanctuary. You, cannot do the work of leading us in shared ministry and vision alone. You need all of us.

If you participate in the choir or weekly music, go to someone closest to you holding a lit candle and light your candle. Without you, there is no music to fill a room with joy.

If you have participated on a committee, brought something for fellowship hour or dinner, or participated in an evening event, go to someone closest to you holding a lit candle and light your candle. You create beauty, nourishment, and fun as the ones who complete the projects.

If you are a parent with a young person in the RE program, go to someone closest to you holding a lit candle and light your candle. Parenting is not done alone. It takes a village. You are raising those who are the future light bearers of this church.

If you are a friend, family member, neighbor, member, new to our community, or care about making the world a better place, turn to the person with a lit candle closest to you and light your candle. With you, this community feels full and filled with light.

**Jenny:** Your candles express our gifts and expressions in physical form and their connection to the spiritual light we depend on more than we know.

**Jerry:** Today, we celebrate and bless this shared ministry, this wonderful collection of gifts from your hearts. May there be joy in the work to come... may expressions of gratitude and appreciation flow freely... may there be courage for honest and sometimes challenging conversations..., and may forgiveness and grace be found within these walls. May the work of this community bless all of you and the communities around you.

Shalom, Salaam, Ashe, A-ho, Namaste, Amen, and Blessed Be.

Please gently blow your candles out. Carry with you a commitment to being curious about what lights up who we each are, and let us join and sing hymn 121, We'll Build a Land.

**Closing Hymn** – 121 – We'll Build a Land

**Extinguish Chalice** – Melody Lee

**Benediction** — from Mother Teresa – Jerrie Hildebrand

“Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love must be put into action, and that action is service. Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do, but how much love we put into the doing; a lifelong sharing of love with others.”

**Postlude** – This Little Light of Mine