

Spring 2014

Crossings

*The Magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Church
at Washington Crossing*

Cooking With Love
Food Ministry Brings Our
Mission to the Streets

Ready for Change?
5 Things To Know About
Ministerial Transitions

Passionate and Compassionate
Keziah Lets Her Light Shine on a Global Stage



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CROSSINGS: OUR PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Articles in *Crossings* focus on the positive work done by UUCWC members and friends demonstrating our congregation’s commitment to the [7 Principles](#). Many good works by our committees, teams, and individuals are inspirational. Unless you are intimately involved with these efforts, however, you may not be aware of the time and selfless dedication, the challenges overcome, or the joy experienced by those involved — not to mention the impact on those who benefit from their work. By telling our stories, we hope to inspire even greater engagement in social justice, charity, and other positive efforts within UUCWC.

UUCWC MISSION STATEMENT

Inspired by our Principles and Purposes, members of the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing unite to create a welcoming, caring religious community. Within this community, we encourage and affirm the individual’s quest for authenticity, wisdom and spiritual deepening. We gather to celebrate the wonder of the cosmos and the mystery of life, its passages, its joys and sorrows. Compelled by justice, we give voice to societal concerns and reach out to touch the lives of others.

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Join the Journey.
Open to You.



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‘LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE’

John Murray’s famous appeal to humankind captures the way Keziah Groth-Tuft demonstrates her compassion for others. Keziah’s internship at the UU-United Nations Office was a transformative step on that path.

Story by Phyllis Warren



The UUA has a time-honored and expansive perspective of our congregations: We are not just insular communities of like-minded people who support one another but communities that reach out to the world to transform it in fundamental, life-affirming ways. In a recent issue of *UU World*, Rev. [Tom Schade wrote](#): “Our purpose is to develop people who would care about an issue and feel the strength to act.”

This vision finds no better exemplar than 18-year old Keziah Groth-Tuft, of Lambertville, now a first-year student at Dickinson College. Keziah beautifully, gracefully, and humbly embodies this philosophy and way of life through her commitment and quiet dedication. In fact, the UUA’s sixth principle — the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all — captures her interest, work, and values.



Keziah (middle front row) participates with other UU-UNO interns in a first-day orientation.

Left: Keziah participates in a protest in Manhattan last May, two days after the killing of a gay man whom police say was taunted with homophobic slurs. Several thousand people turned out to protest the hate crime.

“At UUCWC, “We were taught to be aware of the world around us and that some people are less fortunate than we are and so we should help them.”

— Keziah Groth-Tuft

For three weeks during her senior year at Solebury School, Keziah interned at the United Nations through the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist [United Nations Office](#) (UU-UNO). The office, whose vision is the promotion of sustainable development, peace, and justice throughout the world, is the [UU presence at the United Nations](#).

The UU-UNO’s goals were attractive to Keziah when she applied for her internship in 2012, but the experience she gained when putting them into practice while working at the UU-UNO in 2013 was a transformative experience that helped to crystallize her passion for them. Today, she continues to pursue those goals through her college coursework and volunteer activities.

When I first met with Pamela V’Combe, UUCWC’s UU-UNO liaison, to talk about Keziah, I was struck by Pam’s enthusiasm about Keziah’s goals, abilities, and accomplishments. “I was honored to be able to help Keziah with her internship,” Pam recalls. But it wasn’t until I sat down with Keziah myself in the home she shares with parents Charlie Groth and Dan Tuft and sister Adelaide that I truly began to appreciate Pam’s admiration for this extraordinary young woman.

TELLING WOMEN’S STORIES

At the UU-UNO, Keziah became involved with the [Every Child Is Our Child](#) (ECOC) initiative. This program focuses on children made vulnerable by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and works toward achieving the UN’s [Millenium Development Goals](#)



Manye Akweley, whose profile Keziah created as part of her work on a microgrant program, sells corn and cassava dough to support her seven children. Her work earns her the equivalent to less than 1 cent per day.



Otseami Atta Djobua, another woman whose profile Keziah created as part of her work on a microgrant program, is her community’s Queen Mother’s spokesperson. The Queen Mothers Association cares for children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS — a task very few community members are willing to do.

of universal primary education, fighting HIV/AIDS, reducing hunger and poverty, providing health-care, and promoting gender equality. ECOC partners with the [Queen Mothers Association](#) (QMA) in the Manya Krobo district in Ghana to provide shelter, food, clothing, books, and other school supplies to help children whose families have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

The women in this organization — the Queen Mothers — are usually wives, mothers, or other relatives of tribal chiefs. In Ghana, the Queen Mother has sovereign political power on issues within her sphere of influence, such as health, water, education, and, increasingly, the welfare of women. The Queen Mothers identify the children in Manya Krobo who are vulnerable because one or both parents has died or has HIV/AIDS, then take up to six of these children into their own homes to be nurtured and educated as their own children. In preventing these children from living in an orphanage, QMA provides them with stable homes and in an environment free from stigmatization.

QMA also helps needy women become more self-sufficient by providing microgrants to help them create new businesses or improve their existing businesses. One source of this funding comes from [Threads of Change](#), which designs and markets high-quality, hand-crafted goods such as computer covers made from African fabrics. A portion of its proceeds goes to QMA, which provides these women with seed money to purchase items they need, such as coolers for keeping cold the fish they sell or equipment to start or expand a “chop bar,” which is West African parlance for a roadside restaurant and gathering place.

One of Keziah’s responsibilities was to create story cards for Threads of Change. These cards profile individual women who seek QMA microgrants, and the cards Keziah wrote helped prospective customers learn more about the women who would benefit from their purchases. One example is Manye Naaki Gomeh, who currently sells beads but wants to sell provisions because there is an existing local market for them. Another woman, Manye Narkur II, now trades in lace but wants to open a chop bar. Both women, Keziah says, long

for a more stable income for themselves and the children they care for.

Keziah’s sense of compassion for people in need may be traced, in part, to her Sunday school instruction at UUCWC. “We were taught to be aware of the world around us and that some people are less fortunate than we are and so we should help them,” she says. “This lesson has definitely stuck with me.”

A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

Keziah says her internship was a valuable opportunity to learn how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) work within the UN. “Within the UN buildings, I attended meetings that included ambassadors of other nations and representatives of larger NGOs like UNICEF. Whenever I was in the same room as some of these high-ranking officials, I couldn’t help but be star-struck. It was amazing to able to work in the same area as these people, and I hope one day to work within the UN.”

At the UN, Keziah also acquired some strategic skills. “One of the skills the office teaches its interns is the skill of networking,” she recalls. “As one of the only interns with a UN pass during the month of my internship, it was up to me to network with organizers and attendees of various panels in the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples.” Through this process, she came to understand the value of cultivating personal relationships in pursuing one’s goals. Sometimes, she learned, even the little practical things matter — like to have business cards on hand at all times. The importance of this practice came home to her one day while she was in the office.

“The climax of my networking experience came when, toward the end of my internship, a woman from one of the first panels I attended came into the office asking for me in particular to possibly coordinate efforts with the UU-UNO for the



The UU-UNO office is in the Church Center, across the street from the UN building.

benefit of indigenous peoples,” Keziah recalls. She realized that, in all likelihood, this would not have happened if she had not been able to hand that person one of her cards. “I directed her to Bruce [Knotts, director of the UU-UNO] because I was leaving, but it felt great to have someone ask for me.”

Nickie Tiedeman, office and intern coordinator at the UU-UNO office and Keziah’s immediate supervisor, describes Keziah as “an outstanding intern,” adding, “I wish she was still with us.”

One of the forums on indigenous peoples that Keziah attended focused on the parallels between defacing the environment and attitudes towards women. She described to me how her confidence grew as she first listened to other people posing questions to the presenters and eventually began posing questions herself. Her networking experiences would not have happened had she remained on the sidelines and not shared

OPPORTUNITY AWAITS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Young people at UUCWC interested in learning more about internship opportunities at the UU-UNO can contact Pam V’Combe at uu-uno@uucwc.org.



A card-carrying member: Keziah's UN pass for attending panels in the conference buildings at the UN.



The Indigenous Women and the Environment panel that Keziah attended as part of the UN Indigenous People's Conference.

her perspectives and experience. As Keziah talked with me about her work and the sessions she attended, her face and body language vividly reflected her enthusiasm for opportunities like her UU-UNO experience that enable her to learn from and help others.

LIVING ON POP-TARTS

Being an intern at the UN was not Keziah's first experience with sustainability issues, gender inequality, and economic injustice. The previous summer she visited Jaipur, India, for 10 days. This was no easy trip. First, she had to save enough money to pay for the trip. Second — and perhaps far more difficult — she had to persuade her parents and physician that it would be safe for her to be in India despite her history of hospitalizations with Crohn's disease. She navigated that hurdle by agreeing to limit her diet to Pop-Tarts, naan, and bottled water. "It was not a great long-term diet, but doable for 10 days," she says.

Keziah's purpose in going to India with Rustic Pathways was not to see famous sites. Instead, she worked in two orphanages. At Taabar Home, a

home for boys rescued from slavery, she tutored a boy named Prahmad to help him improve his English. At Surman House, a more traditional orphanage, she and other members of the group painted the stairwell to brighten it and "spent a lot of time playing with the 83 children who live there." Consider that Keziah viewed this 10-day trip as a vacation! When she visits another country, Keziah doesn't "want to be a tourist"; instead, she wants to observe, participate in, and learn from the reality of the lives of local community members.

Keziah's volunteer work is full of many varied examples of her caring and sense of responsibility to help heal the world's suffering. Charlie provided too many examples to repeat here, but there is a core around which they all revolve: sensitivity to the suffering of other people; a desire to help them; and a desire to develop the knowledge, leadership skills, and commitment to make that desire a reality — whether the issue involves sustainability, climate change, sexual orientation and gender identity, or the oppression of women and children.

Charlie saw changes in Keziah as a result of her internship at UU-UNO. "It was really neat to see the

blending in those three weeks of the intellectual part and the social activism part" of her daughter, she says. She also noticed an improvement in Keziah's confidence. With a mother's pride, Charlie reports that when Keziah first started, she was learning to network with other people; by the end, people wanted to network with *her*.

Charlie feels that many things that had been developing in Keziah came to fruition during her internship; she saw in her daughter a willingness to take advice and learn to apply much of what she had previously learned. "I want to live in a world [Keziah and others like her] create," Charlie says with a smile.

PHYLLIS WARREN is a lawyer who retired from the state of New Jersey, where she spent her career representing and working on behalf of abused and neglected children. She has been a member of UUCWC for more than 10 years.

COMPASSION CULTIVATED OVER A LIFETIME

Keziah is as passionate about her career goals as she was about her work at the UN. Even before she entered college, she was clear about what she wants to do — to work either at the UN or a non-governmental organization. Not surprisingly, her international studies coursework is focused largely on globalization and sustainability. She is taking Arabic and Spanish, and is thinking about going to Germany this summer for a month to work on sustainability issues.

In recounting the factors that have influenced her life and career goals, Keziah talks about her participation at UUCWC. Here, she learned about the suffering that exists in the wider world and developed an appetite to do something about it. "I've been helping with the HomeFront meals since fourth grade," she says, "but I think more what influenced my involvement in the UU-UNO is taking part in events like the Pride Parade in New Hope." Keziah also credits her involvement in Girl Scouts, where she won many awards for complex service tasks, her two years as class president at Solebury School, and her year as co-president of the school's Community Council, where she was the lead planner for class dances, fundraisers, and community service projects.

Finally, she talks about the influence of her parents. She absorbed her father's love for politics and her mother's fascination with folklore and cultural anthropology — two threads, and many others as well, that are woven beautifully together to form the life goals of this talented, courageous, and dedicated citizen of the world.

MANNA From Titusville

In the stealth of the weekday, UUCWC's Food Ministry quietly labors in love. You might be surprised to learn just what goes on in the kitchen, goes out on the road, and goes straight to more than 350 grateful people per month.

Story by **Margaret DeAngelis**

Photos by Barbara Drew, Mike Dalzell, and Margaret DeAngelis

HERE'S A RIDDLE: What operates every week, fueled strictly by volunteers and donations, has no budget, and feeds more than 350 people a month?

It's our own Food Ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing. The Food Ministry demonstrates our Unitarian Universalist principles with its quiet dedication to our congregation's mission. What's more, it does this without a dime from the church's operating budget.

It may be difficult to understand how a program that provides food to families and individuals each week can be self-sustaining. Run by a planning team, the Food Ministry works on donations of food, money, and time from people in our congregation. "When we first started, we were amazed at how much the members of the church gave. We called for hams and we got 100 pounds of hams," chuckles Rollie Rahn, co-chair of the Food Ministry.



Each member of the planning team — from Rollie and his co-chair Mike Muccioli to Bonnie and Bernie Ruekgauer, Sue Smith, Jackie Thomas, Elliott Dunner, and Nancy Neff — has a role. Mike and Rollie do all of the cooking, Bonnie works the financial side, and Bernie, who helps out in all aspects, is state-certified in food safety as a "serve-safe" person. Nancy is also working toward certification. Jackie is the group's secretary, Elliott is the shopper, and Sue Smith is in charge of publicity. Another 15 or so volunteers help with meal preparation, food donations, and deliveries.

If you aren't around the church in daylight hours during the week, you could be forgiven if you thought this happens maybe twice a year. But in truth, the Food Ministry's work occurs like clockwork, week in, week out. Food prep and cooking take place in the kitchen several mornings and afternoons each month. Volunteers deliver, box, prepare, and organize, all under the direction of the planning team.



Marilyn Cichowski and Rollie Rahn remove lasagna to be prepared for today's delivery while Bonnie Ruekgauer minds the stove.

It's a lot more than most people — starting with me — probably realize. What I learned from talking with members of the Food Ministry is that "A lot happens in our church that flies under the radar," as Mike says. "A lot goes on that we do not know." I suspect that the same is true with many other social justice groups at UUCWC.

And people like Mike don't mind the anonymity. In fact, if I were to say that the people on the planning committee are the heart and soul of food ministry, I'm sure they would object. Rollie made it clear that the real heart and soul of the Food Ministry is our congregation. Members and friends donate ingredients, perishable foods, and nonperishable items. And the pantry gets replenished as needed. Without everyone's support, this just couldn't happen.

Little things are important

Cooking 350 meals a month alone is a big job, but as chefs Rollie and Mike explain, so much more is needed to make it all a success. Preparing, organizing, cleaning, and sanitizing are just a few of the tasks performed with the help of church volunteers each week. Rollie and Mike seemed so matter-of-fact as they explained what they do each week, belying the fact that *food ministry* is no easy task. It's extensive and time consuming. And it's eye opening: I never realized exactly how the Food Ministry's magic gets done. It's a labor of love — but nonetheless, a labor.

The Food Ministry has been in place for about 4 years. Before then, our kitchen had to be renovated — an expensive and lengthy process.



Nancy Neff helps with food preparation while Rollie Rahn packs meals to go. The Food Ministry team selflessly gets the work done without calling attention to itself.



Transformation of our kitchen from a place where food could only be warmed for fellowship events into a commercial-grade facility that helps UUCWC fulfill its mission could not have happened without a sizable donation by David Hughes in memory of his father, Morgan. Now, it is not only a functioning kitchen for our church but is township sanctioned with a trained serve-safe person so the Food Ministry can provide meals to groups outside of our church.

What do these things mean — *township sanctioned* and a *serve-safe* person? They mean that our kitchen passes strict township guidelines — among them, that someone be certified as a safe-serve person and who can train and certify other full-time members of Food Ministry. Jon Holcomb was the Food Ministry's first certified safe-serve person and an original member of the planning team. Jon took a training session, then made sure that Rollie and Mike were trained and certified. Recertification is required periodically.

Big deal, right? Yes — it is a big deal! It means that each safe-serve person must have knowledge of food temperatures and how to clean, cook, and reheat food. They must know how to keep a kitchen sanitized, even down to the basics of how to wash your hands, when to use gloves, and how to avoid passing bacteria from towel to towel. When you serve others, there is no room for contamination.

There's a lot more to the serve-safe certification, but you get the gist. Each day before food is prepared, the countertops, utensils, and pots and pans must be sanitized. And after the meals are completed and sent out, the kitchen gets sanitized again. It's a never-ending process. Think about this when you stroll into the kitchen during Sunday morning coffee hour. Everything has to be sanitized each time a different function takes place.

"At, home we don't always operate that way — towels, clothes, animals are sometimes on your counters — but at church, it has to be a different story," says Rollie. Were truer words spoken? Sometimes when a spill happens in my own kitchen, I wipe it away with my sleeve. I would not be a great example for the Food Ministry. But there is hope. One can become certified.



The dinner Mike Muccioli and Marilyn Cichowski prepare to wheel out of the kitchen might be someone's only hot meal in a week.

A serve-safe person also has to be present if another group uses our kitchen, such as when a group rents our facility. A serve-safe person's job is never done.

Places to go, people to feed

Who does the Food Ministry provide for, and when?

Technically, members of the team work a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Several times a month, the Food Ministry is downstairs, hard at work, living up to UUCWC's mission.

The Food Ministry helps a variety of groups. One is the HomeFront [Family Preservation Center](#) (FPC). The FPC has a large cafeteria but can only keep food warm or refrigerated; it is not licensed to make food. So on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, meals leave UUCWC for the FPC at approximately 11:00 am.

"Our church has been involved with HomeFront for almost 20 years — from the tutoring program and donating furniture, to the annual craft party at Christmas," says Bonnie. "The fact that we are able to feed people is really walking the walk. Living our UU principles. This hot meal may be the only hot food in a day or a week for someone."

Someone else's cherished hot meal might be headed to Luther Arms, a [Section 8](#) HUD housing complex on Trenton's Broad Street for senior citizens with limited incomes. The Food Ministry's 11:00 am delivery on the fourth Wednesday of the month coincides at a point on the calendar when some residents are running low on funds — making the meal especially welcomed.

The [Lawrence Community Center](#) (LCC) is another beneficiary of

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

The Food Ministry's work can happen only because of "members like you." Our food pantry remains stocked because our members and friends bring in fruit cups, juice boxes, granola bars, boneless turkey breasts, frozen mixed vegetables, ziti, and pureed and crushed tomatoes, just to name a few. And for those of you who can't bring food, your cash donations are equally important because the Food Ministry can stretch those dollars and buy in bulk. Donations of food or cash are all tax deductible. Just mark "Food Ministry" on the check.

The Food Ministry usually makes its needs known through all-church e-mails or [Crossings II](#). And while donations are welcome, it's much like Sunday Fellowship Hour: Your physical presence is always welcome. Can you be there one morning a month to chop vegetables, clean dishes, help with transportation, or just to drop off a check?



Taking it to the streets: Marilyn Cichowski, Nancy Neff, Rollie Rahn, and Bernie Ruekgauer load dinners into the car for delivery. You might be surprised to learn that this scene plays out in front of UUCWC several times each month.

the Food Ministry's generosity. On the second and third Thursday of each month, meals leave UUCWC at 5:00 pm, just in time for dinner. LCC is a social/recreational program with two parts: a discovery club for kids and another component for parents and adults to learn life and survival skills. LCC is operated by HomeFront.

Thirty supper bags are prepared on the third Tuesday of each month, leaving the church at 6:30 pm for the Lawrence Library on Route 1. The bags go to a group of HomeFront children who are tutored at the library.

"People cannot eat in the library, so the bags are brought to the bus," says Rollie. Each bag consists of a turkey-and-cheese or peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich; a granola bar; a fruit cup for dessert; a box of 100% juice, and a napkin and spoon.

Once a month, during fellowship hour, 50 snack bags are filled. These go to HomeFront, to use as needed. This usually happens whenever the Food Ministry has enough supplies to fill the bags. An assembly line forms in the Crossings Room,

with children and adults queuing to help.

How does Food Ministry choose its beneficiaries?

"We have been approached by other groups to provide meals. One of the criterion is the group must be not-for-profit," says Bonnie.

At this point, the team has a full plate, serving as many people as resources and manpower allow. But, Bonnie adds, HomeFront changes programs based on funding, "so Food Ministry is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of HomeFront as they might change."

Taking care of our own

The Food Ministry also gives back to our congregation that so generously gives to it. Extra food is prepared for our own members and friends who may be in need. The Food Ministry works with the Caring Ministry to make this happen.

As Rollie and Mike showed me around the kitchen, I asked if they get extra donations that they did not ask for. Rollie and Mike looked at each other and laughed. Rollie pulled open a freezer door.

"You see this?" asks Rollie, gesturing at bags inside the freezer. "This is about 20 pounds of baked potatoes that just showed up in the freezer. We can't really use them for outside groups, so we're making something else."

Suddenly I realized this was an unexpected task for them, but Rollie and Mike manage to keep their sense of humor through different surprises. "Now one of our members who isn't feeling so well is getting potato soup!"

Although the donor's intention was good, food can't go to outside groups if it can't be known if it was made in a "serve-safe" way. The moral? The Food Ministry needs your donations, but please check what is needed and what the Food Ministry can prepare. (By the way, dear donor, I tried the soup. It was delicious!)

Anyone with the Food Ministry will tell you what it needs. You also might find out that in any given year, you provided 80 pounds of ham, 408 servings of mashed potatoes, 36 pounds of mixed vegetables, 157 packages of cookies, and 144 packages of brownies. You might discover that Pennington Market provides breads and desserts and that Starbucks donates desserts that have not been sold.

"A sacrament"

Our Food Ministry is full of enthusiasm. That is immediately evident from talking with anyone on the planning team. It's a passion that's contagious, and once you become part of that passion, it will bring a smile to your face. For Mike, Rollie, and many others on the team, that passion springs from the heart.

"I've had a fortunate life, never being homeless. But I've known people, including one of my own family members, who have been in tough situations," says Mike.

What puts it into perspective for Rollie is his daughter, Natalie, who lives in HUD housing. Many of her neighbors, he notes, have \$400 a month or less to live on.

"Imagine that! I've seen people run out of food stamps at the end of the month. It's gratifying to provide much-needed nourishment, especially at that time."



The pantry stays stocked, as NPR might say, through the donations of "members like you." Check first to see what donations are needed.

Forrest Church, the Unitarian Universalist minister, author, and former U.S. senator, once said, "Anything that brings us together — inspiring us to open our hearts, hands or minds, to forget our differences for a moment and remember that we are one — is a sacrament."

Exactly. A group that does so much, so quietly, is just one of the many blessings we have at UUCWC.

MARGARET DEANGELIS has been a UUCWC member since 2007. "Growing up in my Italian family, food was love," she says. "Researching this article, I learned that not only is food love, but so are hard work, dedication, and a sense of humor. It is inspiring to see what brings us together and how far we can reach to help others."

ARE WE READY FOR CHANGE?

Part I: 5 Things You Didn't Know About the Selection Process

In business, the odds on success when bringing an outsider into a high-level position are about 50–50. What are the unique challenges that a church faces in replacing a beloved minister of 16 years — someone whom the author describes as “the only one I had known since coming out of the spiritual wilderness”?

Story by **Rich DiGeorgio**



From the [history of our church](#) — skillfully developed by the Transition Team, lovingly designed by Lori O’Neil, and proudly draped in the sanctuary for all of us to absorb — a few things stand out.

First, the average tenure of our ministers, not including Charles Stephens and Carl Bierman, is only 4 years (Charles and Carl each served 16 years). Second, we had had one outright disaster — and not so much in our distant past. Based on our history, it’s not unreasonable to think that finding the right minister who will stay long enough to make a lasting positive contribution will not be a walk in the park.

Having more than 40 years’ experience in human resources-related work, I wondered what the UUA has learned about effectively selecting a new minister — and how those learnings compare to good practice in the world of business. Here are five things I learned.

1 Much research and thought have gone into the process of replacing a minister

A good place to start is [A Change of Pastors... And How It Affects Change in the Congregation](#) by Loren B. Mead. The current edition of this book was published in 2005 by the Alban Institute, which does a great deal of research into pastoral leadership. The research that underlies the book stretches back to the late 1960s and continues today.

Among the key findings of this research:

“Quickly we discovered that the issue we had to deal with in every congregation was the relationship between the clergy and the lay leaders.”

Wait a minute: I am a lay leader. That means a lot of my friends and I can affect the success of the new minister.

As I was thinking about this, it came to my attention that our recently retired and beloved minister did not have an easy transition in 1997. Elders within our congregation recall that Charles faced a problem many leaders face: He followed two very popular ministers. In sports, you don’t want to follow a very successful coach; those shoes are hard to fill. The same is true in business.

Charles was different in two important ways. First, he was not female at a time of great sensitivity in the aftermath of a previous minister’s sexual misconduct. Second, while Charles was a good preacher and possessed great personal warmth, some in the congregation who hadn’t yet come to know him — and who missed his predecessor’s “pulpit style” — quickly judged Charles. And so, in Charles’s first year or so at UUCWC, there was opposition to him. Our then-board president never felt it got to the level considering seeking a replacement, but there some heated meetings about it took place. Some members left the congregation. Some actively recruited others in the cause.



Carl Bierman, top, was our minister from 1962 to 1978. His longevity was matched only by Charles Stephens.

Why bring up this unpleasant past?

“It’s important to understand that any minister will have some people that dislike him,” Charles told me recently. “And so we should expect some members will leave and others will join based on the gifts of our new minister.”

Our own history illustrates why the UUA has always put so many resources into the process of helping congregations deal with the challenges of ministerial transition. In developing a process for transition, the UUA did its job. Now, it’s our turn to do ours. As a congregation, we should understand the role we play in the success or failure of a new minister.

In hindsight, we could have lost a good minister in 1997. If we had, we never would have known what we lost.

Why UUA developed a rigorous transition process

A little research turned up John Weston, former director of transitions at the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). To John, who is now retired, “Helping congregations find new ministers is a core process for UUA — if not its most important process.” The better UUA matches ministers and congregations, the stronger the whole of our faith movement. John was responsible for moving from the old way of handling transitions to a new way.

Why change? “No one was happy with the old process,” says John. After a year of administering the old process, which had been battered by complaints from ministers and congregations alike, he saw an opportunity for change. Hampered by limited resources, the old process basically gave each congregation a choice of 10 ministerial candidates. This put the director of transitions in the unenviable position of power broker. Ministers were unhappy with the UUA because they were not getting in front of congregations that interested them. Congregations were unhappy that (in their own eyes) someone was limiting their choices — not always to candidates who might be a better fit for them.

Working with lay leaders and interim ministers, John saw opportunities to change the process entirely by utilizing research into effective transitions and capitalizing on new technology made possible by the Internet.

The new process was designed to help congregations get their house in order, which would enable more effective selection of a minister. It strongly recommended a transition period — preferably 2 years for larger congregations, those who had enjoyed the presence of a long-time minister, those that had dismissed a minister, or those where there was obvious conflict in the congregation. “Congre-

gations that use a transitional minister for 2 years have a 90 percent chance of successfully selecting a new minister at the end of the transition period,” says Keith Kron, the UUA’s current director of transitions. Success is defined as congregational approval of the candidate the search committee has put forward. “Congregations that use a transitional minister for only 1 year have just a 55% chance of successfully selecting a new minister.”

Key components of the transition process

The new transition process involved two important elements: Use of a transitional minister and development of a structured approach for search committees and UU ministers seeking new positions to follow.

The transitional minister’s role differs from that of a settled minister. In part, the transitional minister functions as a troubleshooter, helping the congregation address obvious and hidden internal issues that could impair the relationship between a congregation and a settled minister. When a minister departs, for instance, unwritten protocols are exposed for the mirage that they are — sometimes leaving prominent members of the congregation feeling threatened. The transitional minister can take an impartial look at deficiencies in organizational structure and work with lay leaders to institutionalize processes. By the end of this period, the incoming settled minister can focus on doing the work the congregation has said it wants him or her to do — rather than having to engage in internal problem-solving from the start.

Businesses often face similar issues. From my perspective, however, best practice in business lags behind that in churches. When a founder retires or dies in a successful business, for instance, it would be a good time to consciously try some version of an interim CEO. All too frequently, the successor is a huge failure — often, for many of the same reasons it’s difficult to succeed a successful long-term minister. The experiences of

Hewlett-Packard and Apple are two glaring examples of what can go wrong.

In addition, the transitional minister provides a psychological buffer. This is particularly important for congregations such as ours that had a long, positive association with the previous minister. Human beings have a tendency to compare everything about the new leader to the old. For a new minister, this creates an unnecessary barrier to success.

While the transitional minister is preparing the congregation for a settled minister, the UUCWC Search Committee is following the process begun by John and his colleagues. Fully described in [*The Settlement Handbook for Ministers and Congregations*](#), the search process takes a year to unfold and can be expected to consume 250 to 400 hours of each member’s time. Some of our search committee members might tell you that the estimate of hours is on the low side, so let’s not overlook their dedication and effort.

As an HR leader, I have to say our transition process is impressive for several reasons. First, it empowers ministers seeking a new congregation and congregations seeking a new minister to do the best job they can to make an authentic match. Second, it removes UUA from a power role, effectively making it the equivalent of an umpire who makes sure that both sides put forward accurate and comprehensive disclosures. Third, coaching is provided to both sides so they can excel.

Truthfully, most large businesses could learn from such a process when selecting leaders to fill higher-level jobs. By contrast, businesses need to give talented leaders multiple types of experience to prepare for very high-level jobs. This means they can’t stay in a role for 7 or more years — a tenure



Gus Caton breaks ground for our present-day church building. The first worship service was held at UUCWC on Oct. 5, 1975.

that, according to Alban research, gives a minister distinct advantages.

What makes this process work

The success of the matching process is enabled, in part, by technology. The Internet, combined with software applications, powers the matching process so that it is market-driven, confidential, and fast. This allows ministers and congregations to find the best match possible.

But like anything technological, the old adage applies: *garbage in, garbage out*. John and Keith, the retired and present directors of transition, both believe it is critical for potential ministers and congregations to be candid with each other.



Jane Shafer (left), UUCWC's longtime archivist and unofficial historian, looks at the History of UUCWC project in our sanctuary last fall with her daughter, Martha Sheeley.

"For any match to work, each must put forth accurate pictures of themselves, even though it is human nature to cover our warts," says John. "If there is conflict in the congregation about the importance of growth, the potential minister needs to know about it."

Keith also believes that several other aspects of the process are important. UUCWC has taken steps to address these aspects in the past year and a half:

- *Learn from your past.* Last year's history project allowed the congregation to reflect on this.
- *Be open to all possibilities.* [The Beyond Categorical Thinking](#) workshop at UUCWC last September was designed to foster open-mindedness.
- *Take a longer view on what is best for our*

congregation. What kind of minister will serve our needs today? Or in 2 years, when we celebrate our 100th anniversary? Or 4 years from now, when we hope to have achieved most of the goals in our [5-year strategic plan](#)?

- *Adopt the mantra of the search process* — "Do it well," not "Do it quickly" — says Keith.
- *Offer the new minister fair compensation.* The congregation last year passed a budget that aligns with UUA fair compensation guidelines.

How well is this new process working? One metric of success may be that, in general, complaints from congregations and ministers have largely subsided. Keith point outs another: Since the adoption of the current system, the number of matches lasting less than three years has decreased sharply. In fact, only twice in the last three years has a minister not lasted all three years.

5 What can lay leaders and the congregation do after the new minister is selected?

John and Keith both thought this was a key question. In many respects, what we do after the minister is selected is even more important than the actual selection process.

John feels — and he admits that this is controversial — that members of the search committee should stay out of leadership roles for a few years. He has found that people who are not thrilled by the ministerial choice can turn on the search committee. Inevitably, there will be issues that have to be worked out between the congregation and the new minister; if members of the search committee are in leadership roles, it would be natural to become defensive in support of the minister they recommended. This creates potential to derail the ability to work out issues involving the new minister.

That first year can be make-or-break, says Keith, so one of the first orders of business for the congregation is to ask itself: *What do we need to do to build trust between ourselves and the new minister?* "When settlement does not work out well, a major problem we have seen is ineffective building of trust in the first year on the part of the congregation and/or the minister."

The UUCWC Transition Team is sponsoring dialogue circles with the congregation on how it can help with the success of a new minister (see right). The meetings, March 21 and 23, are open to all. In the next issue of *Crossings*, we will go into more depth about some of the issues discussed in these meetings and the challenges a minister faces in the first year — and how we as a congregation can help to make that first year successful.

RICH DiGEORGIO is a professional change management consultant and has been a member of UUCWC since 2005.

"NOT A LIGHT BULB" Dialogue Circles to be held March 21 and March 23



A minister is not a light bulb—we don't just replace the old one with a new one. Each minister is different in style, personality, gifts, ideas, and other not-so-obvious differences. To settle a new minister successfully, we must be ready for a few bumps in the road.

The Board of Trustees and the Transition Team invite everyone to take part in a forthcoming "Not a Light Bulb" dialogue circle about ministerial change. Each will be preceded by food. Please RSVP to community@uucwc.org.

Friday March 21, 6:30 pm
(pizza provided)
Kids can come in pajamas.

Sunday, March 23, noon
(soup and bread to be served). Activities will be provided for children.

UUCWC'S ANNUAL AUCTION

IMAGINE!



March 23:
Auction
catalogues
distributed

March 30 &
April 6:
Silent Auction

SATURDAY, APRIL 12
LIVE AUCTION

Festivities begin at 5:00 pm

The participation of members and friends of UUCWC makes this annual fundraiser an exciting social event as well as a successful fundraiser that helps support important church programs. We are counting on your support.

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