

Summer 2014

# Crossings

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



**Raising Our Voices**  
5 From UUCWC  
Join the Moral March

**Honeymoon Is Upon Us**  
Why a Minister's 1st Year Is So Critical

**'This Is *My* Lettuce!'**  
HomeFront Kids Take Pride in Allie's Garden





**Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing**  
268 Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, Titusville, NJ 08560  
(609) 737-0515 • [www.uucwc.org](http://www.uucwc.org)

**Transitional Minister:** Rev. Jennifer Brooks

<b>Board of Trustees:</b>	Andrew Conrad
Steve Fishbein, President	Bill Cox
Maria Baratta, Vice President	Mary Lou Dahms
George Faulkner, Treasurer	Mike Dalzell
Bernice Husk, Secretary	Mike Hanson

The electronic version of this magazine contains hyperlinks. If you are reading this in PDF format, click on the [underlined text](#) for more information about the phrase or subject.

**CROSSINGS: OUR PRINCIPLES IN ACTION**

Articles in *Crossings* focus on the positive work done by UUCWC members and friends that demonstrates 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.

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

*Crossings* is produced quarterly by the UUCWC Communications Committee.

**Editor:**  
Michael D. Dalzell  
[crossings@uucwc.org](mailto:crossings@uucwc.org)

**Graphic Designer:**  
Lori O’Neil

**Chair, Editorial Advisory Board:**  
Rich DiGeorgio  
[communications@uucwc.org](mailto:communications@uucwc.org)

**Editorial Advisory Board:**  
Jim Bicksler  
Elliott Dunner  
George Faulkner  
Marty Friedman  
Loren McAlister  
Lynne Quinto  
Jane Shafer  
Roger Shapiro  
Dan Tuft  
Pamela V’Combe  
Regina Podhorin Zilinsky

**Writers:**  
Mary Lou Dahms  
Margaret DeAngelis  
Karen DiGeorgio  
Rich DiGeorgio  
Sarah Irgang  
Chris Piatek  
Phyllis Warren

**Photographers:**  
Barbara Drew  
M.J. Hansen  
Colin Unsworth  
Bert Wolfe



Copyright 2014, Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**4 Learning Love, Nurturing, and Patience**  
Under the care of UUCWC’s Earth Ministry, Allie’s Garden is a place not only of sustainability, but of life lessons. With their hands and knees in the soil, the HomeFront children who planted the garden grow their spirit of compassion.

**10 “Forward Together, Not One Step Back!”**  
A half century after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, there are still places in America where voters are disenfranchised. UUCWC members joined 85,000 others in this year’s Moral March in North Carolina to say “Enough is enough.”

**16 Are We Ready for Change?**  
As we gather together in the new church year, there will be stages to our relationship with Rev. Kim Wildszewski. The most important may be the honeymoon period, which sets the tone for her ministry. What can we as a congregation do — and what should a new minister do — to ensure the success of the honeymoon?

*Cover photo by Mike Wilson*



# SEEDS OF SELF-DISCOVERY

With their hands and knees in the soil, the HomeFront children caring for Allie's Garden are learning more than just how to plant vegetables. They are learning how to nurture, lead, and grow their spirit of compassion.

Story by Michael D. Dalzell  
Photos by Barbara Drew

The creature was entirely at the mercy of the boy who held it. A 4-inch earthworm twitched back and forth in the boy's palm. Born without eyes, earthworms can sense only light, and this one seemed to be searching for the familiarity of the dark, damp soil. Fascinated, the boy stared at the worm that could not stare back at him.

"It tickles!" he said. The boy's friends crowded around, equally rapt.

"It's gonna poop in your hand!" said another. The very thought was enough to make two or three of his friends jump back.

"They won't hurt you," laughed Philo Elmer. "They're not man-eating earthworms."

The boy gently set the worm down on the ground. The children circled it, then watched the worm nestle into the earth and disappear.

\* \* \*

Walk through the fire doors outside the UUCWC office and take about two dozen steps to the north. Have you noticed what's there? Worms, yes — especially after a rain. But also broccoli. And carrots. And radishes. Not to mention leeks, onions, potatoes, and lots of leafy greens. By now, in late June, most of these things should be recognizable.

All were planted by 17 [HomeFront](#) children on a quintessential spring day in April. Based in Trenton, HomeFront works to end homelessness by harnessing community resources. UUCWC has partnered with HomeFront on various initiatives for 18 years. Under the gentle guidance of volunteers from UUCWC's [Earth Ministry](#) and HomeFront tutoring programs, the children who visited that morning took the first step toward fulfilling Allie Titus's vision.

Three years ago, Allie, the daughter of UUCWC member Wendy Stasolla, was thinking about what to do for her Girl Scout [Gold Award](#) project. Gold Award projects must identify a national issue,

make a lasting difference in the community, and be sustainable. "Allie and I met and discussed several ideas," says Philo, co-coordinator of UUCWC's Earth Ministry. Finally, they settled on a "Garden for the Community" — what eventually became known as Allie's Garden.

The disappearance of supermarkets in urban communities — a phenomenon that has resulted in what is known as [food deserts](#) — means that many impoverished inner-city families have no choice but to shop at convenience stores and corner bodegas. Moreover, rising produce costs have made it difficult for many such families to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

"I would like to use the garden as an opportunity to educate the HomeFront children on good nutrition," Allie, then 17, told *Crossings* [in February 2012](#). Allie hoped to "instill in them an affinity for fresh fruits and vegetables by letting them help grow and harvest the produce."



"Farmer Al" Johnson and Wendy Stasolla help HomeFront children sow seeds in Allie's Garden.





Al Johnson, Philo Elmer, and Bernie Ruekgauer show the kids what they will be planting this day.

With help from Allie's family and friends and a few folks from the Green Sanctuary Committee, Allie broke ground on the 20-by-50-foot garden that spring. Since then, HomeFront kids have taken responsibility for planting and harvesting. "That was meaningful to Allie because she tutored HomeFront kids," Wendy says. "Allie was excited to leave a lasting contribution to the HomeFront program before she went to college."

The funny thing, Philo recalls, was that "Allie had never grown any vegetables on her own." But, oh, how she got into it. "You should have seen Allie digging in the garden, getting dirty the first day. And at the first harvest, she danced around — holding an 18-inch zucchini above her head."

Like Allie, few of the kids here in April had done any gardening. In fact, "Most of these kids have never even *seen* a garden," says Mike Muccioli, who co-leads UUCWC's [Food Ministry](#) and who cooks dinners for the HomeFront students at their Monday night tutoring sessions. But with their hands

and knees in the dirt, the HomeFront kids were — like Allie — well, *digging* it.

\* \* \*

"Farmer Al?" Philo called to Al Johnson. "What are we planting today?"

Al, who co-leads the UUCWC Earth Ministry with Philo, gestured to some small containers of lettuce, kale, and spinach. Each had sprouted, ready for transplantation into the earth. Al explained what was in each container.

"You a farmer?" one child asked Al.

Next, Al held high some seed packages for all the kids to see. The packages bore bright, colorful pictures of vegetables and herbs.

"What do you do with herbs?" Philo asked the kids.

Silence. The kids didn't seem to be familiar with them. Suddenly, one child eagerly offered, "They make food taste better!"

Philo showed the children plant food pellets, calling

them "worm poop." Philo knows how to get kids' attention. Boys, in particular, seemed fascinated with the notion that worm poop makes plants grow. Boys and girls alike wanted to hold the bottle of worm poop, bravely taking a few pellets in their hands — as if touching them were a badge of honor. As the day progressed, some of the same kids made the rounds in the garden, ensuring that anyone who put seeds in the ground also laid down a healthy dose of worm poop with them. They made it their business that nobody would skip that step.

It didn't take long for the children to catch on to the rhythm of planting. Several took it quite seriously. With military precision, one boy

carved a long trench, carefully dropped in his payload of carrot seeds and worm poop, and deliberately covered his row with soil. This he executed with an air of duty, but his smile told me he was having fun just the same.

\* \* \*

In a sense, some of the food grown in Allie's Garden comes full circle. The green leafy sprouts that Farmer Al showed to the children came from [Isles](#), a Trenton-based not-for-profit group that works to revitalize communities and promote healthy living. (The Earth Ministry is a member of Isles.) Two of Isles' many initiatives are to improve open space and expand access to locally grown food. The sprouts planted on this day began life in a vacant block in Trenton that Isles transformed into a community garden.

To complete the circle, some of the vegetables grown in Allie's Garden are fed to the kids at Monday night HomeFront tutoring sessions.

"The kids have a chance to see how that starts and ends, and they get to be a part of it along the way," says Chris Marchetti, who runs HomeFront's Joy, Hopes, and Dreams program. "It's really positive. They see where food comes from — that it doesn't just come from a market."

For some of the kids, that's nothing short of a revelation. Philo tells a story about a girl who came to last year's planting.

"She looked at the picture of a radish on the seed package," he recalls. "Then she held up a tiny seed in one hand and pointed to the seed package with the other hand and said, 'You mean *that* comes from *this* seed?'"

\* \* \*

By now, the kids were clearly taking pride in what they were doing. One showed me a row of lettuce he had planted. "This is *my* lettuce!" he said with a big grin.

It didn't matter how unusual the object; the kids wanted to know what to do with it. Onion bulbs were particularly mysterious — "They look like a piece of apple," said one boy — so Al showed him which end of the bulb was the root and how to orient onion bulbs in the soil.

After taking his instruction from Farmer Al, the boy lined his onion bulbs in the trench in a neat, steady row. Next to him, two other children were bunching their onions too closely. The first boy turned to them and showed them how it should be done. The kids were starting to instruct one another. Pride in accomplishment had turned into leadership.



An embryonic vole the kids found in the garden. The girls were very protective of it, keeping the boys and their rakes away.





"Worm poop?" That's how Philo Elmer characterized the plant food. Feeling brave, the boys gathered 'round to take a few pellets in their hands.



When some kids were done planting what they had been given, they looked around for

more. One girl spied the Brussels sprouts and looked at Al. "I want to plant these!" she pleaded. "Please? Please?"

I asked her if she knew what they were.

"Brussels sprouts!" she said happily.

"Do you like those?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "With butter!"

\* \* \*

What did the HomeFront kids learn from the day's activities?

"Not just the practical skills, though that's good," says Chris, "but they learn how to grow something and understand that it takes time, effort, and patience."

"It's fun to see how they experience planting," adds Al. "Especially seeds, which they have to nurture."

Chris picks up on Al's thought.

"A lot of kids jumped at the chance to come today," he says. "There's something that has to do with planting and nurturing that captures their attention, and they want to be a part of it. This is a good means for learning how to take care of things. Kids have

a spirit of compassion — they want to take care of everything."

Proof of this concept was playing out in another field on the other side of the church. In a small plot they were clearing near the children's playground, some HomeFront girls found a little family of voles — some embryonic and none appearing to be in good shape. The girls' empathy kicked in. Not wanting the little creatures to be hurt, the girls kept away the boys and their rakes. "Stop — you're going to make them die," said one little girl to a boy who got too close.

The girls covered the vole colony with a small rotting log to keep it shaded. When I asked if I could lift the log to see, they agreed — but one girl immediately used her hands to shade the tiny critters from the sun.

The scene suggests that kids have an inherent — if not yet fully developed — sense of our [interconnected web of existence](#). "I've worked with kids my whole life," says Philo. "I love it when kids can get connected with the earth. It's great for them."

Great for them — and sustainable, too. The lessons the children learned on this day may live with them for the rest of their lives.



Some of the vegetables planted in April will be fed to kids in the HomeFront tutoring program later this year. Nurturing Allie's Garden teaches kids not only how to grow something, but also that it takes time, effort, and patience.

MICHAEL D. DALZELL is a freelance writer, editor, and an award-winning journalist. He became a member of UUCWC in 2006 and serves on its board of trustees.



# BENDING THE ARC

A half century after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, there are still places in America where voters are disenfranchised — and a 2013 Supreme Court ruling threatens to accelerate this trend. UUCWC members joined 85,000 others in North Carolina earlier this year to say “Enough is enough.”

Story by *Mary Lou Dahms*

Photos by *Rev. Jennifer Brooks*

*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*

— Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King first spoke these words — drawn from the writings of Unitarian minister Theodore Parker — in his 1967 speech “[Where do we go from here?](#)”

Four stalwart members of UUCWC, along with 1,500 other Unitarian Universalists and about 85,000 fellow citizens, marched in answer to that question, joining the struggle to bend the arc and shorten the path toward justice. The four — Judy McLaury, Mike Wilson, and Connie and Pete Rafle — attended the Moral March in Raleigh, N.C., along with Rev. Jennifer Brooks on Feb. 8 to protest strict new voter restrictions in that state.

## What’s it all about?

First, a little background on the march that inspired the five to stand alongside fellow citizens who face the biggest challenges in complying with North Carolina’s new voting law.

For the past 7 years, the [Rev. Dr. William Barber II](#), president of the North Carolina state conference of the NAACP, has been growing a movement called the Historic Thousands on Jones Street People’s Assembly Coalition (known formally as “[HKonJ](#),” named for the address of the state legislature, but informally called the “fusion coalition”). The coalition’s more than 150 organizations that work toward greater justice for all include faith groups, labor unions, women’s groups, LGBT organizations, and environmentalists.

The [2014 Moral March](#) was the largest in a series of annual protests, each held on the second Saturday of February. By contrast, the first Moral March, in 2007, drew about 1,000 people — making the growth of the event impressive. The annual march is the centerpiece of HKonJ activities that include “Moral Monday” protests, which began in April 2012 and continue today. Twenty-four Moral Mondays across the state and 12 Moral Mondays held in Raleigh have resulted in 1,000 arrests. The movement aims to be transformative, rather than political, by holding North Carolina legislators accountable to the people of North Car-

olina rather than to a narrow partisan agenda.

North Carolina’s passage of new voting restrictions was made possible when the Supreme Court [invalidated Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act](#) in June 2013. The court’s action freed [nine states, as well as several counties](#) (many of which were in North Carolina), from having to clear voting changes with the federal government. The federal clearance requirement had been in place since 1975, on the basis of historical abuses in those locations that hindered people’s right to vote.

A month after the Supreme Court decision, North Carolina passed the Voter Identification Verification Act (VIVA). VIVA’s many provisions include (1) strict voter identification to cast a ballot, (2) a reduction in the number of days allowed for early voting, (3) the elimination of same-day voter registration, and (4) limitations on out-of-precinct voting. The U.S. Justice Department sued North Carolina, challenging these four provisions. A hearing on whether to grant an injunction to prevent those provisions from going into effect will take place in July. If the suit goes to court, it will not be heard until July 2015.

The NAACP had already been working with Unitarian Universalist and other denominations’ ministers to mobilize churches when it asked congregations and other organizations to respond to a call in December to join the Moral March. Unitarian Universalist Association President Peter Morales felt that we, as a faith community, had to act. The hope was to draw as many citizens as had marched from Selma to Montgomery 50 years ago. After Selma, President Johnson presented a bill to a joint session of Congress that would later pass and become the Voting Rights Act — now partially invalidated by the Supreme Court.

## Heeding the call

Rev. Jennifer carried the call from the UUA to our congregation, preaching a sermon “Creating Freedom” in mid-January. Her sermon focused on the march and a commitment to attending — again answering the question King had asked all



A Moral March protestor leaves no doubt about his feelings.



*“It’s scary to consider the power of big money to suppress voter turnout, especially the turnout of those voters who might offer a different view about whether their elected legislators are working to represent the interests of all.”*

— Pete Rafle

those years ago: “Where do we go from here?”

It was clear to our members who attended and to all UUs that our first principle, “The inherent worth and dignity of every person,” was being violated. And, as people of action, we would invoke our fifth principle “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large” to come to their aid.

Judy, Mike, Pete, and Connie all cited the Moyers and Company segment “[State of Conflict: North Carolina](#)” in January as their initial inspiration for wanting to show support. Jennifer’s sermon galvanized them to take action.

For her part, Jennifer found herself asking, “Do we have to do this all over again — struggle for the right to vote, for the assurance that everyone is represented and all voices are heard?”

Rev. Barber’s nonviolent and nonpolitical agenda also appealed to her, as well as his patient insistence on “no hating” and his advocacy for all human beings. Jennifer felt that she had to go and stand shoulder to shoulder with people committed to justice.

Jennifer saw the North Carolina Legislature as a government organization that kept inequality alive by enacting legislation designed to make it harder for the poor to vote, violating the principles of democracy in the process. To Judy and Mike, the North Carolina legislature was a government institution that was trying to undermine the basis of our democracy. Pete and Connie found it stunning that funding from business mogul Art Pope and his [Citizens United PAC](#) could result in the election of conservative candidates who overturned years of progressive legislation. Pope has since been installed as State Budget Director.

“It’s scary to consider the power of big money to suppress voter turnout, especially the turnout of those voters who might offer a different view about whether their elected legislators are working to represent the interests of all North Carolinians,” says Pete. “For some in the South, their world is being turned upside down, and they are afraid



Unitarian Universalist Association President Peter Morales stands on the side of love together with United Church of Christ General Minister and President Geoffrey Black during February’s Moral March. (Photo: UUA)

of the new order. These are their last-ditch attempts to fight it.”

Pete echoes the feelings of others when he says, “I’m just ashamed for our country. I have a hard time saying the words ‘with liberty and justice for all’ in the Pledge of Allegiance.”

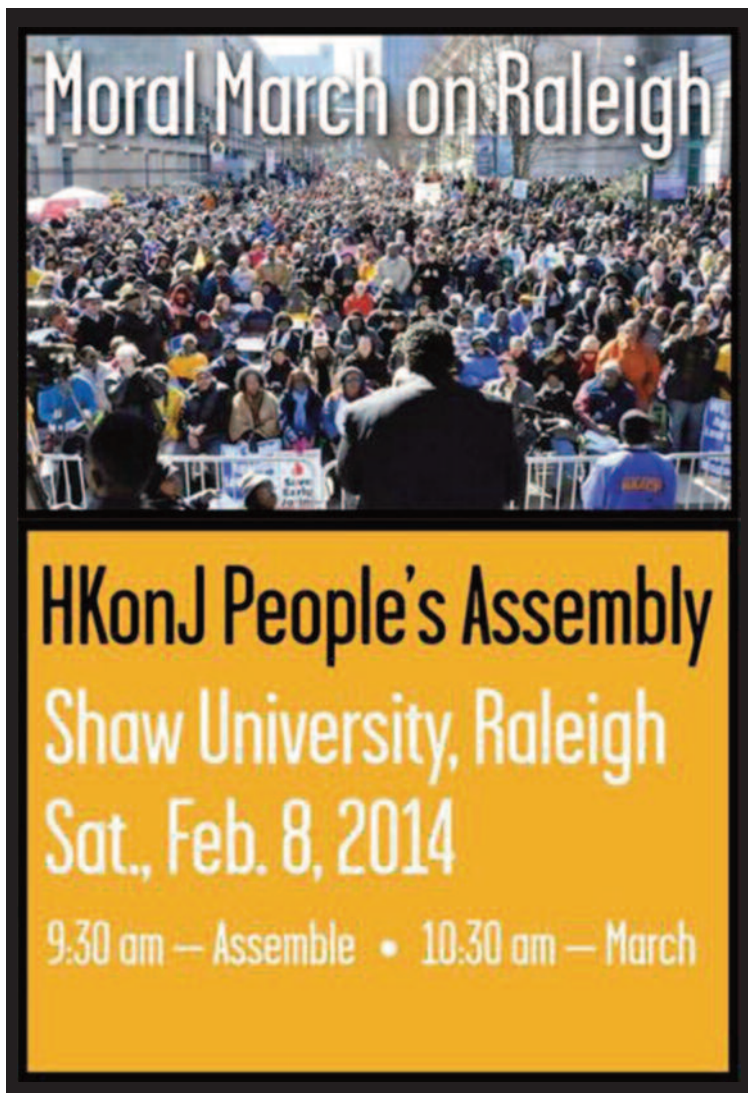
Mike spoke of the impact of “dog whistle politics” in the South and in other places that push agendas that undermine fellow citizens who already have so little power to influence those agendas. “Dog whistles” are phrases and statements that are seemingly innocuous but are coded messages for discrimination. For example, invoking fears of “voter fraud” is code for suppressing the votes of African Americans and other minorities. In reality, [voter fraud is extremely rare](#) and unlikely to be prevented by voter ID laws, so it is simply not an issue.

## A powerful experience

All five who attended said they would go again and expressed gratitude and awe for the impressive organization of the [Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh](#) in welcoming fellow marchers and providing food and transportation. They found the whole experience to be energizing and Rev. Barber to be a dynamic and moving speaker.

To Jennifer, the day was a powerful experience of solidarity, commitment, and hope.

“I can’t even describe how moving it was to be in that crowd,” she says. “We all sang ‘We shall overcome’ — and at the end of a day of rain, the sun came out and shone over all of us, blessing our message of hope and joy and shining equally







A sea of gold: Unitarian Universalists don their Standing on the Side of Love shirts at the Moral March.

on rich and poor alike.”

How does one sustain the high of sharing an experience with so many like-minded people who feel that justice is important enough to fight for? How does one ensure that the Moral March and the ongoing Moral Mondays will have a lasting impact in helping to reverse the disheartening trend toward exclusivity and elitism that offer choices and opportunities only to those who are already privileged?

Persistence, for starters. The Civil Rights movement was a decade-long affair, punctuated

by episodes of unspeakable violence and other setbacks that failed to derail people with a common vision of justice. That realization may help to temper frustrations shared by people like Pete that more is not happening to change the direction of

legislation in states where it seems that some are more equal than others. “At least you don’t feel completely powerless,” Pete says. “You are out there with others doing what you can

to oppose laws that are not fair or just.”

The five UUCWC members also expressed disappointment in the lack of mainstream media coverage of the event, given the high attendance. They hope that, together with their fellow marchers, they can continue to hold up what is happening in North

It was clear to our members who attended and to all UUs that our first principle, “The inherent worth and dignity of every person,” was being violated.

Carolina and across the nation in other states.

One marcher carried a poster that said, “Welcome to North Carolina! Set your watches back 50 years.” If that statement seems extreme, here are some of the other steps taken by the North Carolina legislature on which the fusion coalition shines a light:

- Redistricting to weaken the power of African-American, Hispanic and young voters
- Restrictions on women’s rights to abortions and other healthcare
- Rejection of the Affordable Care Act’s expansion of Medicaid, closing off greater access to healthcare for the poor
- Cuts to unemployment compensation
- Cuts to taxes on the rich while levying new taxes on the middle class and poor
- Reductions in funds for public education while subsidizing vouchers for privatized schools
- Undermining the rights of immigrants and LGBT North Carolinians

In the coming year, the fusion coalition plans a full campaign of organizing, outreach, litigation, and voter registration and mobilization. Let’s lift up our voices along with Jennifer, Judy, Mike, Pete, Connie, and the other marchers, as they say on Jones Street in Raleigh, “Forward together, not one step back!”

MARY LOU DAHMS works as an editor at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. She has been writing stories since she was 8 years old. This one reminded her of a long-ago Vietnam War protest march she attended in Washington. Mary Lou has been a member of UUCWC for 11 years and currently serves on its board.



All aboard! Connie and Peter Rafle riding Amtrak on their way to Raleigh.



Unitarian Universalists from around the country, such as these from the First Unitarian Society in Newton, Mass., joined the march.



# ARE WE READY FOR CHANGE?

## Transitioning to a New Minister

### Part 2: Honeymoon to Long-Term Partnership

Story by Rich DiGeorgio

*As with all new pastorates, there will be stages to our relationship with Rev. Kim Wildszewski. But the most important stage will be the honeymoon period, which may go a long way toward determining whether we will have a long-term fit. What can we and a new minister do to ensure the success of the honeymoon?*

**S**o we selected a new minister unanimously. Most of us, including me, were tremendously impressed by Rev. Kim Wildszewski's multitude of attributes that contributed to that 100% vote to call her as our 17th minister. Have we selected the perfect minister to meet our needs?

Not so fast! In the course of researching this article, I discovered that Rev. Kim, who was raised on Long Island, is a lifelong New York Giants football fan. Now, a couple of folks I know — including me — think that takes her beyond perfection. But we, who live in mostly Eagles

territory, hired a rabid Giants fan? This honeymoon may not last past [Oct. 12](#).

In all seriousness, experts on effective ministry — such as [Roy M. Oswald](#), an ordained Lutheran pastor who has written 16 books on congregational life and leadership — know that the first stage of a relationship with a new minister is the honeymoon phase. Like a marriage, we desire a long-term positive partnership when we call a minister. And, like a marriage, stuff happens; how you both handle that stuff defines the quality of that partnership. In the book, *Beginning Ministry Together*, Oswald and James and Ann Heath offer this theory about the honeymoon period:

#### **Crisis of Authentication:**

The congregation tries in many ways to discover if the image and the reality match. The *image* is composed of personal, professional, and authentic aspects. The *reality* is shaped by conflicts, problems, and crises. How these situations are handled leads the congregation ultimately to conclude whether there is a reasonable match between image and reality. Assuming the match is acceptable, the congregation and minister then need to come to an appreciation of the minister's strengths along with where the congregation will need to complement the minister and share responsibility. No one can do it all.

Oswald, who was a senior consultant for the [Alban Institute](#) for more than 30 years, estimated in 2003 that for at least a third of all new ministerial tenures in recent years, the match was either troubled or unhappy in Year 1. Recently, one of our neighboring congregations, [Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Somerset Hills](#) (UUCSH), went through a painful period after its founding minis-

ter moved on. UUCSH had two interim ministers, both well received, sandwiched around a called minister who lasted only 3-plus years and who did not meet their needs. That added up to more than 7 years of turmoil before UUCSH [called Rev. Jennifer Kelleher](#) last year. Jen Kitchen, vice president of the Board of Trustees at UUCSH shared with me that in the process, however, the congregation learned that its strength was derived not from whomever was in the pulpit but from their sense of community — a bond that would help the congregation transcend the turmoil.

Writing in [In It for the Long Haul – Building Effective Long-Term Pastorates](#),

Glenn Ludwig shares the thinking and research on the importance of ministries that last at least 7 to 10 years: "Somewhere between 5 and 7 years, something positive happens in a pastorate. Decisions come easier, interchange of ideas is easier. The trust that has taken time to develop has laid the groundwork for growth, depth, and change to arise from the foundation of respect and love."

So, up to now, we have established the need for a long-term partnership and that doing so is not a walk in the park. I have

every confidence we will succeed. Why? Because I know UUCWC and, based on my experience, I think we made a great choice. The rest of this article lays out the challenges a minister faces in taking on a new pastorate. Understanding those challenges will help us to be more compassionate. The article also points out what the Unitarian Universalist Association, this congregation, and a minister can do to meet the challenges successfully. This is not a report on what we are planning to do, but rather an article about what we might consider doing, based on how authoritative recommendations align with the dynamics of our congregation.



Rev. Kim Wildszewski



## The challenges

**W**e all have become aware of one significant challenge a new minister faces when following a long-term, beloved predecessor: He or she is not the same person. That seems obvious now, but its significance is something we have grown to understand in the last two years. Under our transitional minister, Rev. Jennifer Brooks, we also learned a great deal about ourselves and our covenant to one other (see “The Gifts of Transitional Ministry” on page 19).

Looking ahead, here are five significant challenges culled from readings and interviews for this article. Each could be relevant to us.

1. “The biggest challenge for a new pastor is to control the desire to make changes during the first few months. ... A new pastor should first identify the most important changes needed to move the congregation to greater health and growth. Almost everyone will say ‘Yes’ to a new pastor at least once; the moment of agreement should be saved for something that is really important to the congregation. Many pastors rush to make cosmetic changes, often in the worship service — which is probably the worst place to start because it affects the largest number of people and is the least rational feature of congregational life. When a pastor makes changes before getting to know the congregation, people feel personally rejected.” (Oswald)
2. “80% of pastors involved in building projects leave within 2 years of the completion of the project. Why? Ministers use up all their currency in getting the project done.” (Ludwig) This will feel familiar to some long-time members who were involved in the construction of our current sanctuary. Keep in mind that our [5-year strategic plan](#) calls for consideration of a capital campaign.
3. “It is easy for a minister to feel overwhelmed and underappreciated given that the job is demanding, [has] lots to do, and much of the congregation sees the minister only on Sunday

and can wonder what she is doing the rest of the week.” (Oswald)

4. The ministry will take every ounce of effort and time. In a study of those that recently left the clergy, 1 of the top 3 reasons for leaving was burnout. The Alban Institute estimates that 1 in 5 clergy members suffer from burnout. Ludwig postulates that ministers burn out not from overwork but from being overburdened with the trivial and the unimportant. Burnout occurs when energy is expended without fuel being added. To a minister, that fuel is the conviction that what they do is meaningful.
5. A minister serves both individual and congregational needs. This is an interesting distinction for ministers compared with leaders in most other professions. Most other leaders are counseled to look out for their people with good policies, rewards, and support but to stay away from becoming too personally involved with individuals they lead. Ministers, however, must be intimately involved with their flocks to be effective on the pastoral level. And at the same time, a minister must provide congregational leadership to guide the whole in addressing challenges and crises. Sometimes, the best path for the congregation is not the best path for an individual member. So it is quite possible to be a very good leader but a very poor pastor — or vice versa — but of course, we want someone who can do both.

## How UUA supports new ministries

UUA support comes from the district level. “About 6 to 8 weeks after the minister is in place, the district runs a facilitated workshop for the minister and leaders of the congregation,” says UU Metro New York District Executive Andrea Lerner. The purpose of the workshop is to make sure the minister and congregational leaders are in sync on such matters as roles and responsibilities; challenges; and appreciating each other’s strengths, areas of interest, and how the minister and congregational leaders can

complement each other’s competencies to the benefit of the congregation.

The district also supports activities that encourage ministers to network and learn from each other. Rev. Kim has been very active in these networks and has taken a leadership role.

Of course, if there are problems between the minister and the congregation, the district has resources to help both the congregation and minister work through the issues. Jen Kitchen, at UUCSH, is very complimentary of the district’s help over its congregation’s 7-and-a-half year journey: “It walked the talk when things did not go well. Things were done in a way that respected our principles.”

## How UUCWC can enable the success of the new ministry

Because we are talking about building a long-term partnership, it only makes sense to focus on the congregation’s responsibility in building the partnership. There is much we can do, and we seem to be off to a good start.

Scores of UUCWC members participated in the “Not a Light Bulb” dialogue circles, in which members were asked to think about attitudes and steps that might increase a new ministry’s chances of success. The advice that came up most frequently was:

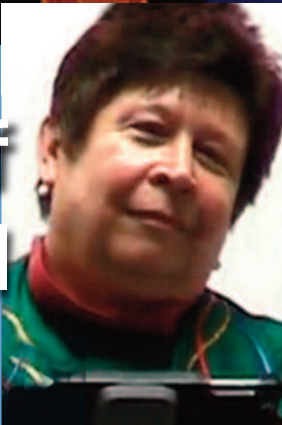
- Be open — to each other or new ideas, for instance
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Listen to each other
- Learn about each other before acting

During Candidating Week, many members were able to talk substantially with Rev. Kim to get to know her and to enable her to understand us. The events I attended were welcoming and engaging.

What additional advice can we glean from those who study ministerial transitions?

Oswald suggests setting up a mutual ministry

# The Gifts of Transitional Ministry



Most people in our congregation would probably admit that we weren’t prepared for transitional ministry. We knew a transitional minister would put some distance between Rev. Charles and Rev. Kim, preventing unfair comparisons. And we were warned that a transitional minister would shake things up — but the depth of the self-examination we’ve been forced to do along the way to choosing a new minister is only now becoming apparent.

The truth is, without Rev. Jennifer Brooks, we wouldn’t be where we are now: so confident in our future that we were unanimous in our belief that Rev. Kim was the one to take us there. Through Rev. Jennifer, we became acquainted new tools for dispute resolution — the stakeholder meeting, for instance — and learned about how the use of ministry teams can inspire members to volunteerism, to name two.

Rev. Jennifer did what she was charged with doing: She tossed us up in the air and got us ready for change. May the UU Congregation of Fairfax — Rev. Jennifer’s next assignment, in Virginia — be so lucky.



review team, which focuses on how the minister is doing in the start-up phase and how the congregation is responding. The idea is to identify what is working well and issues that need to be addressed to maintain a productive relationship. He suggests quarterly reviews, keeping them simple by asking three basic questions of each other: *What would you like me to keep doing? What would you like me to start doing? What would you like me to do less or stop doing?*

Oswald also recommends forming a pastor/parish relations committee, which has a very different purpose than the Mutual Ministry Review. The role of this committee is to provide support to the minister by monitoring the unique demands that the congregation places on the minister. Not so long ago, a similar body existed in UU congregations — the ministerial relations committee (MRC). The MRC focused on the health of the relationship between the minister and the congregation. This grounded the MRC's existence in a PR goal that consultant Rev. Robert Latham has advised “is not necessarily compatible with either the purpose of professional ministry or the congregation’s reason for being.” An MRC, he warned, can devolve into an exercise in “ministerial advocacy” that becomes counterproductive.

To avoid this, says the UUA’s Lerner, most UU consultants have moved away from the MRC model, recommending instead a construct advocated by Latham. Its foundation is that a congregation exists because of its mission, and that ministry should do everything it can to fulfill this mission. Latham envisioned a team that works to elevate the effectiveness of a ministry by keeping a congregation focused on fulfilling its mission through its ministry.

UUCWC’s Board of Trustees will work with Rev. Kim to appoint a Transition Team designed to help facilitate the success of the new ministry. The team — the composition of which will follow UUA best practices — will help to orient Rev. Kim with our congregation, its mission, and our aspirations for fulfilling it.

*I know how to be a minister, but not a minister at Washington Crossing, so there will be a lot of discovery.*

— Rev. Kim Wildszewski

**B**ecause burnout is a significant risk to any minister, a congregation would do well to have compassion and understanding about the human needs of its minister. We could take some advice from an article Rev. Kim sent to me after my interview with her. In “[How To Stop Working 7 Days a Week](#),” Rev. Carey Nieuwhof reminds fellow ministers that they are only human — which comes with natural limitations. I will phrase the advice as if the author was writing to a congregation and not to other ministers:

- Consider whether an urgent request is truly an emergency and whether the minister is the only person who can help
- When the minister tells you the truth about his or her nonavailability, be happy the minister has a life outside of his or her job
- When the minister says no, accept it with grace

Ludwig recommends that the congregation concentrate on creating a climate that supports a long-term pastorate. The following, he says, are key ingredients in doing that:

- Learn from the past. Don’t fight it or repeat it
- Appreciate that each person in a leadership role brings certain gifts. Build on them; an individual’s gifts should be recognized, encouraged, and used for the sake of others
- Use the minister’s gifts wisely
- Learn about forgiveness and reconciliation

- Pay the minister according to fair compensation guidelines. This encourages the minister to stay
- Encourage strong lay leadership
- Deal with conflict appropriately, taking a problem-solving rather than a blame approach

### How the minister contributes to a successful transition

Those who study ministerial transitions also offer suggestions for a new minister. They include:

- Control the urge to make changes in the first months on the job
- Be an anthropologist: Observe and learn what makes the congregation function as a total system. Understand why some of its preferences and practices have become so firmly established
- Handle crises with integrity, while being thoughtful, deliberate, and a calming influence
- Take care of yourself to avoid burnout
- Seek feedback
- Build a support network

**O**ur new minister seems to have a good grasp on the experts’ advice. Asked about the keys to a successful transition, Rev. Kim focused on relationship building and earning and building trust with the congregation. She emphasized learning about UUCWC and its members through pastoral relationships.

“I know how to be a minister, but not a minister at Washington Crossing, so there will be a lot of discovery,” she says. To that end, she believes it is important to allow for the minister and congregation to ask questions of one another and to listen to committees and teams about their issues and challenges.

From her past transitions, Rev. Kim says, two key learnings stand out. One relates to the Nieuwhof

blog referenced above: It is important to reach an understanding with the congregation that balance is important. Rev. Kim is fully committed to being the best minister for UUCWC she can possibly be. At the same time, it is important for the congregation to respect that church life will not consume 100 percent of her time.

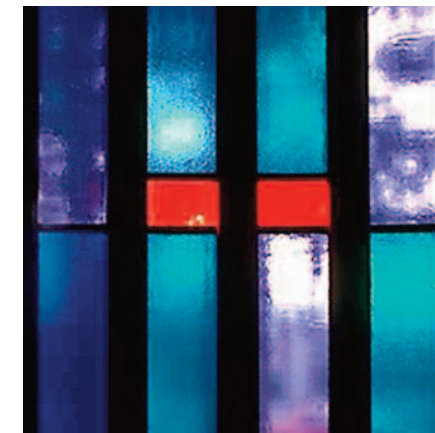
As wonderful a communicator as Rev. Kim is, she has learned that, inevitably, a minister will make a misstep with someone in the congregation. She has come to see these missteps as “an opportunity for building a deeper working and spiritual relationship with the individual involved. While never emotionally easy, taking the time and making the effort to work through the issue with

the individual almost always results in a stronger personal bond.”

Finally, we talked about what she does to avoid burnout. She is acutely aware of the issue and employs a number of strategies to avoid burnout. She enjoys spending a lot of time with her family, has a close set of friends in our area who are not mem-

bers of the congregation, and has developed a set of good friends within the clergy who she can talk with about the stressors of church life. Physically, she takes care of her body through running, walking her dogs, and eating well.

Taking all this into consideration, I am certain that we can make it well past Oct. 12 — this year’s first Giants–Eagles game — and welcome Rev. Kim to UUCWC on the way to building a long-term partnership.



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



# UUCWC Annual Kirkridge Retreat October 17-19, 2014

# Eat Play Love

Join us for  
a renewing  
weekend  
full of food,  
fun and  
community.

Workshops  
Hiking  
Silent Meditation  
Yoga  
Worship  
Fun-filled activities

Cost of weekend is \$200, includes  
all meals, lodging, and activities.

Saturday Daytrippers – \$40

[www.uucwc.org](http://www.uucwc.org)



Join the Journey.  
Open to You.