

3 July 2016

Dear members and friends of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent,

Deeply tasting the bitter and the sweet, I am writing to let you know that I will be resigning as your minister. I spoke with Kathie Slater, the Moderator of the Board of Trustees, on Friday and met in a special session with the board, our Commissioned Lay Ministers and Affiliated Community Minister today. Together we determined that I will reduce my hours to half time on October 1 and that the last Sunday service I will lead will be the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 20. I'm sorry I am not able to share this news with each of you personally.

The primary reason for this decision is because Evin and I want to give our children a closer connection to our family and friends than we are able to give them here in OH. We want our children to be able to see the same people on holidays and birthdays and ordinary days too and to grow up with the support and nurture of those relationships. I anticipated that I would make this move at the end of this next church year by seeking another called parish ministry position nearer to family and friends. However, an opportunity for ministry came to my attention earlier this summer that seemed like it could be a really good fit for me personally and professionally. I applied, and last week I was offered the opportunity to become the new Associate Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA).

Over 1800 Unitarian Universalist ministers in the United States and Canada are members of the UUMA, which is a professional organization dedicating to nurturing excellence in ministry through continuing education, collegiality and collaboration. The UUMA has been served by an Executive Director for several years; the Associate Executive Director is a brand new position created to respond to significant growth in the organization. Approximately half of my new role will include implementing and overseeing a brand new continental program for those who are preparing for Unitarian Universalist ministry called the Ministerial Formation Network. The other half of my time will involve working with various UUMA staff teams to further the mission of the organization. I am excited to have this opportunity to make a significant contribution to the health and the future of Unitarian Universalist ministry.

Because this position is not geographically based, it will allow Evin and me the opportunity to move our family back to New England. And because we plan to live near the region border, Evin is also going to be able to keep their job as Congregational Life Staff for the Central East Region after we move. You may remember that we both grew up in New England and still have many important connections there. This move will enable us to connect our children with a web of support that we know will be healthy for them and for us. I am looking forward to the many good changes being closer to these relationships will bring to my little family.

And, at the same time, I am very sad that these developments mean I have to say goodbye to you. I've thought often over the years that I would remain your minister for as long as you'd have me, if only I could relocate the congregation. You are a wonderful congregation and I love you very much. It has been my privilege to serve among and with you for these last eleven years. I am proud of the work that we have done together. Ours has been a beautiful example of shared ministry. I know that you have helped me grow as a minister and as a person and I can see the

ways the congregation has grown in these last eleven years, too. I hope that during the next few months we can take some time to celebrate our accomplishments, even as we mourn that which will not be with this leave. I am sorry that I will not be here to participate in all the wonderful 150th anniversary events that are planned. I am sorry that I will not be here as the new fellowship hall is constructed. I'm sorry I will not be able to finish supervising Dave Clement's internship. If I could have made this job wait one more year so I could see these things through, I would.

Unfortunately, nothing in life is perfect. The timing of this transition isn't perfect. And I know my ministry has not been perfect. Just as I hope we will name and celebrate the joys of our shared ministry, I also hope we name any disappointments that need to be expressed. My deepest hope is that we can say a good goodbye. I want to offer you blessings for the way ahead and receive yours to take with me when I go. I also want to begin to create the space that will be needed for your next minister to flourish with you, too.

Over the next few weeks, I will work with the board of trustees to ensure the smoothest transition possible. I have already spoken with Rev. Joan Van Becelaere, who will be serving as the primary contact from the Central East Region Congregational Life staff to support this transition. I have also spoken with Rev. Keith Kron, who is the director of the Transitions office at the UUA, to ensure that there will be qualified interim ministers available to apply to be your Interim Minister. The UUCK Board of Trustees will be working through the transition process and will be communicating with you about the next steps just as soon as they can.

I was to be on vacation this coming week, but I am postponing that and will be working my regular schedule instead (except for a few personal appointments I had scheduled) so that I will be available to you should you wish to speak with me for any reason. I hope you won't hesitate to contact me. I know transitions are hard. My deepest hope is that this, too, can be an opportunity for spiritual growth for us all.

With love,

Melissa