

Blessings for the Road

December 19th, 2021

I offer this final sermon as your minister in the spirit of gratitude for each of you, for this congregation, and for the time we've had together.

I saw this congregation as special from my first days getting to know you as your intern minister in 2009, and still see you as remarkable 12 years later as we close this chapter together. Just as our relationship continued after my internship ended, I'm sure our paths will continue to cross in the small world of Canadian UUism, albeit in different ways, and so I offer today's blessings in the spirit of "until we meet again" rather than as a final goodbye.

I want to remind you, once again, that UUCD is a congregation of many gifts and blessings. One of those gifts is how you are with one another: the care and kindness and warm welcome you extend to one another and new people. Even in the midst of turmoil, conflict, and change, you have remained in respectful relationship. That is no small feat and a true gift. I also love how you like getting together... for tone chime choirs and potlucks, small groups and meals. Remember those days of going to a restaurant or having a potluck each week after service? I hope those days of breaking bread together – wheat or gluten-free – will return in the not-too-distant future. And I would be remiss to not lift up the gift you give to children in including and accepting them as an integral part of this congregation. While I know many of you would love to see even more children and families in the congregation, this congregation already has a huge percentage of families compared to many much larger UU congregations (and other progressive religious traditions, too). No matter the number, each child, each family, each person here, from our youngest to our eldest, is a blessing.

I feel blessed, too, to have been your minister. Thank you once again for the warm welcome you've extended to me and also to Curtis and especially Darragh. We will cherish his early days as a beloved part of this community, showered with gifts when you first met him (and many after as well!); he only just recently grew out of the last UUCD decorated t-shirt. Back in person, we were still using signs with him and he would sign "church" whenever he heard the word Durham. He loved coming to UUCD. And I will always be grateful for the grace and understanding you showed me in my transition to motherhood. Darragh and I still have a candle he made, with help, in RE with the kids and Kailee and Birgitta. We are planning to light it as a goodbye together after my last official call with you. There is sadness for us amidst the excitement of new beginnings, a sadness that comes from how much we have loved you and felt your love for us. Thank you for that, always.

A blessing now for leaders, present and future:

Whether worship or board or small group or caring committee or any other leadership at UUCD, thank you for your service. Thank you for bringing your unique gifts to the table.

More than tasks to be completed, leadership in a congregation is spiritual work.
It is for your growth as well as the congregation's.

When it feels too difficult or too much,
and burnout is nigh,
reach out to one another.

Let something go.

Remember that your well-being is more important than any job or role.

Take a break or even a sabbatical – remember that sometimes a successor isn't found
until a role is vacant for a while, allowing it to take new shape.

Collectively, you have what you need: skills and gifts, strength and courage, insight and
wisdom, experience and new ideas, compassion and care for one another and the
world.

Trust that all will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well, as Julian of
Norwich wisely said.

All will be well:

Even when you have to let something go.

Or a service isn't perfect.

Or a disagreement reigns.

Or members come and go.

Things ebb and flow in life and congregations are no exception.

The people who are here on any given day are the congregation.

That will always be true.

Support one another.

You have all you need, and more.

Blessing for newcomers and for people who have yet to find this community:

Welcome to this community of warmth and connection, openness and commitment to
shared values. Welcome to a community that strives to accept each person just as they
are.

Welcome, too, to an imperfect community – where no one is expected to be perfect all
the time, and where we know we sometimes fall short of our values despite our best
efforts.

A mentor once said, this is a community where you are loved just as you are, and too
much to stay that way.

That is true of each person here. And for the congregation – it is beloved just as it is,
and too beloved to stay just as it is forever, changing as it inevitably will with time,
shaped by those here now, those who have gone before, and those yet to come,
children, adults, and elders all.

May this community always be one of welcome, acceptance, and transformation.

A blessing for growth:

Except in the simplest of situations, like a child growing taller each day, growth is an

ambiguous word.

Is growth about numbers? Members? Vitality?

Or is it expansion of connection, in meaning, in wisdom?

How is it measured?

I know this congregation has celebrated times of financial and membership growth over the years, and has had times of waning of both as well.

My hope for you is freedom from anxiety about numbers and money.

I know it's a hard thing, as more money feels more secure and more people feels more successful as well as more hands and hearts and minds to share the work of the congregation.

Even when more people and money would help, the anxiety creates a barrier, not an invitation.

Thus, continue to create meaning and fun and connection.

Focus on growth in the less tangible ways.

When you do that, the people who come will be the right people.

Remember that one event of great connection is worth a dozen of so-so connection.

Let go of the so-so to leave more room for the good to emerge.

And it will.

A blessing for the congregation:

In the midst of renewed restrictions and ongoing uncertainty and change in the world, may you continue to have strength and courage, rest and renewal, wisdom and integrity. Expect challenges from time to time, including times of lack of consensus and even passionate disagreement. Remember the old joke that when UUs were presented with a choice of going to heaven or to a discussion group about heaven, they chose the discussion group.

Assume best intentions when differences and difficulties arise, and remember to honour both intention and impact – your own and others'. Continue to channel that empathy, curiosity, and love that helps find creative ways through hard times.

Enjoy one another, whether on zoom or in person, outdoors or in, formal or informal gatherings.

Have fun and remember to laugh. (Peter and Camron can help with puns and dad jokes, I'm sure.)

Trust that long since wilted flowers and planted seeds will grow again in spring, even if that renewal feels a long way off or like a mirage in the distance.

You have all you need to flourish.

And finally, a blessing for each of you, adapted once again from the one I say to Darragh, and the one I already shared today with the children:

May you be safe from all harm,
May you be healthy in mind and body and soul,
May you be happy, contented, with many moments of joy,
May you be connected to people, to place, to your village, to your passion and purpose,
to the earth, to the God of your understanding,
And may you know you are loved beyond all measure.

May it always be so.

Blessed be.

Amen.