

MINISTERIAL SEARCH TEAM

Reflections on Calling

Jennie Smith on behalf of Unity's Ministerial Search Team

As Unitarian Universalists, we can find ourselves defining our beliefs by what we don't believe rather than what we do. A list of what we don't believe or do is easy for me to rattle off, but expressing our collective identity and values takes more thought. Personally, I'm drawn to our shared principles of justice, equity, the inherent worth of every person, creativity, and boundless compassion. It's our congregation's shared convictions that inspire me.

Similarly, defining "call" can lead to the same challenge of defining it by what it is not rather than what it is. Through conversations at cottage meetings and in Parish Hall and through many stories, we've encountered various interpretations, as different as who we are individually.

For some, it's about endorsing a decision that seems already made, while for others, it's a leap of faith toward a shared vision. One congregant even likened it to an HR process while simultaneously not being like an HR process at all. How do we navigate these diverse perspectives?

It's through this diversity that we deepen our understanding and strengthen our bonds. We encourage each of you to actively participate in discussions and share your own experiences and insights regarding the meaning of calling a senior minister, and to listen to each other. Your perspectives are valuable contributions to our collective journey.

We continue as we have for the past year: listen, ask questions, share stories, and listen again. In this article, members of the search team offer our insights. We encourage you to ponder what calling a senior minister means to you and engage in dialogue with fellow congregants.

Angela: The process of bringing a new minister to Unity is designed and carried out with deep intention. The call is the culmination of that work — all of the conversations and stories, the

goodbyes and losses, the dreams and moments of connection and holiness. Candidating week is a time to do what we practice as UUs — draw the circle wide. The call is a process of discerning whether we will shift the circle in order to create space for our new minister, in the hopes that they will join us in our longing and our work, with deep love for this broken, beautiful world.

Kat: To me, the formal process of calling a minister resonates with the other senses of "call": that we are crying out, seeking to recognize and be recognized in turn. Underneath the meetings and the ballots, what we are doing is saying we have heard each others' voices, met each other where we are, and found harmony. That going forward, we want to belong together.

Jennie: To me calling a minister is a spiritual saying "yes" to possibilities for our future, formalized by the process of our bylaws. Through a call, I reflect on what I know about myself and our congregation and invite someone to dream and achieve with us. In saying yes to a senior minister, and that person saying yes to us, we are inviting space with each other to dream, learn, teach, guide, to be imperfect and to be *amazing* together.

Ray: The MST works for a year to identify a person who has the capacity to lead us... a person we can "call." For us as a congregation, to call a minister, is for us to agree to be in relationship with a person who will lead us... not to answer all our questions but rather to help us find the answers ourselves. I think of it as a call to covenant... a call for us to pilgrimage together.

Rich: This whole process of "calling" a minister is at least as much, if not more, about self-examination and deep reflection as an individual and as a congregation as it is about looking at the resumes and qualifications of potential candidates. It seems like only with some serious hard work looking at ourselves, can we begin to say, "this is who we are,



this is what we want, and these are the qualities we are looking for to guide us, learn with us, and grow with us." I think to call a minister is to tell the world who Unity Church is and then discerning if the person answering that call truly fits what we as a whole congregation have said we want and need.

Rebecca: When I think of calling on a personal level, it feels like being nudged, challenged or beckoned. As I contemplate calling a new minister, it feels more like a personal and congregational "imagining"... imagining our future together, taking that leap of faith, knowing that deep down, we are leaping into the good and grace of a new way of congregational being, together.

Tara: We've been through so much. We have so many hopes and dreams. A new senior minister is a new chapter for Unity, a leap of faith into what we can become, working towards our Ends collectively, welcoming this new minister with open arms.

- What *is* call and calling?
- What is it to you, the congregation, and a candidate?
- What does call mean as a process?
- What does call and calling mean as a spiritual practice and to me as a spiritual person?
- What stories are important to share with a ministerial candidate? What stories do I want them to share with us?

Please take time in the coming weeks to reflect on these questions. As candidating week approaches, we look forward to sharing in the spiritual practices of calling and covenant, together. If you have questions about the search, please contact us by email at mst@unityunitarian.org, or visit us in Parish Hall on Sundays.