

## Navigating the Rapids of Change:

### II. Equipping for the Journey

The Revs. Duane H. Fickeisen and Judy Welles  
and Anne Gero<sup>1</sup>

Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley  
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*When you put your hand in a flowing stream,  
you touch the last that has gone before  
and the first of what is still to come.*

— Leonardo DaVinci

### Opening Words<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. Judy Welles

Some things remain the same. That's the message of that wonderful, classic song that we've just heard as our prelude. Despite surprise and innovation, some things won't ever change as time goes by.

Here in this congregation, we're looking ahead to a year when some things will change for sure, and some things will remain stable and secure. Every Sunday morning (well, except for Association Sunday in York on November 7) there will be a worship service offered in this sanctuary for all who wish to participate — members and friends, newcomers, seekers and



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the merely curious. We'll touch hands, smile into each other's faces, and share a time for curiosity, introspection, and the familiar rituals we've established over the years.

The sleeves and pant legs of our children's clothes will grow too short this year, and we'll all wonder at the swift passage of time since we knew them as babies. They will outsmart us and make us proud of them, and undoubtedly challenge us as well.

The grass will grow and need to be mowed, and people with lawn mowing skills will step forward. (And by the way, have you noticed how great our grounds look these days? Big thanks to the volunteers who are keeping our property so beautiful!)

It will snow, and generous early birds will shovel off our walks and steps so we can all get into the building safely. Something will break, and someone will fix it. No one will sign up to make coffee, but it will be made anyway. The newsletter will be produced every month and the PrE-views every week; not everyone will read them, and then some of you will wonder why you don't know what's going on.

We'll make new friends with people we don't even know today, and we'll deepen the friendships that have already started here. Some of us will cry in church (this is a good, safe place to cry); some of us will get angry with each other (and hopefully make up in a healthy way). We will celebrate together, grieve together, grow together.

We may not exactly know where we are ultimately going, but we've been together long enough to trust that we will get there, and that it will be a good journey together.

Woyaya.

## Sermon

The Rev. Duane H. Fickeisen<sup>3</sup>

Last Sunday we talked with you about navigating through the coming months until the end of June as Judy and I approach our retirement and through the following months of transition in your ministry. We used the metaphor of river rafting to talk about rules for running whitewater that keep the journey safe and fun.

We talked about staying in the raft, and if you fall out, hanging on. We emphasized the need to support your leadership and to paddle hard and to rest well between rapids. And we suggested the importance of keeping the mission in mind as the future unfolds around the next bend.

This week we will address equipping ourselves for the journey. You heard about some of the gear Lewis and Clark took on the Expedition of Discovery. And you heard how the Gods equipped Hercules for his twelve nearly impossible labors. What do you need for the journey ahead?

What are your unique gifts and tools? How can they help UUCV thrive in the months ahead?

Three things came to our minds — effective leadership, tools for finding ministerial leadership, and a sense of what the next nine months hold. I'll talk about leadership, we've invited Anne Gero to tell you why she agreed to serve as your President and about transitional ministry, and Judy will tell you about program plans between now and June. Each of us is mindful, that, like Hercules, you will also need to gather up the tools that you personally can best use through the change ahead.

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Despite the best scouting and the reports of others who have been through the rapids before us, we cannot know all that lies ahead. Therefore it is vital that all of us keep alert and focused and remain flexible to respond to the unexpected.

One of the keys to effective leadership in times of transition and change is adaptability. Adaptive leadership requires continuously evaluating the results of actions with a goal of learning what works (and what doesn't) in order to make changes in response — doing more of what works and less of what doesn't.

The adaptive leadership approach is a way to avoid getting locked into static plans even when they are not working. If the raft is heading for a boulder, the adaptive leader will quickly assess the situation and call out new paddling directions.

You are already familiar with responding to opportunities and challenges in creative ways without undue fear of the risks. That requires staying focused on the long-term mission as a benchmark for evaluation of possible actions.

You took a big risk in accepting our appointment as your first ministers, even before your early leadership felt they had an assurance of adequate financial resources. And another when you bought this building, which at the time seemed far bigger than many could imagine ever needing. And another when you called us to be your settled ministers and started to hire additional staff. And still another when you more recently embarked on sanctuary improvements that required refinancing the building.

You already have very effective leadership in your elected board of trustees, the volunteers who chair and serve on committees, and a cohesive staff team. I'd like for them to be recognized. Will the nine board members please stand? (They

are all listed on the back of the order of service.) And the committee chairs? And anyone who serves on a committee? Thank you. Our new photo directory includes a roster of leaders.

The still newish Lay Leadership Development Committee has been instrumental already in helping committees consider their staffing and succession plans, in recruiting new committee leadership and members, and in hosting a luncheon for committee chairs to coordinate activities. The Building and Grounds, Finance and Fundraising, and Religious Education Committees in particular have benefited from the LLDC's help. The board and program staff will meet in retreat next month to plan for the year ahead.

The lay leaders are supported by your staff team, who have developed a solid collaborative working relationship. Our Music Director, David Glasgow; our Religious Education Coordinator, Willa Jessee; our Office Assistant, Jim Coolsen; and our Custodian, Jim Yarlett each works part time. David and the Jims are each paid for 10 hours a week and Willa for 15. Judy and I are each compensated for half time.

I could say much more about each of the staff members, but this morning I want to lift up Jim Yarlett's work. This is a lot of building to keep clean in just a few hours a week. This month with the homeless shelter using the Dining Room and restrooms each night, the burden of cleaning has increased greatly. Need I say that it is helpful to Jim if each of us picks up after ourselves? Please be particularly patient for the next two weeks while the continue to host the shelter.

Knowing that this was likely to be a year of transition, Judy and I recruited Anne Gero to stand for election as your President, because we felt she would bring experience in leading groups through change, firm and compassionate guidance,

and access to resources from the UUA. We are pleased to have the opportunity to work with her through this year. She will tell you about the process of finding ministerial leadership for the future.

Anne Gero<sup>4</sup>

I have been invited to the pulpit today to explain some things about our transition. Before I address the specifics of the transition, I want to describe why I agreed to serve as your Board President during such a challenging time.

Many of you have thanked me for agreeing to serve as Board President under these circumstances. Following that thank you, there usually is some question like, “Did you know what you were getting in to?” or “Why did you agree?” or my favorite, “Are you crazy?”

I am happy to report that, yes, I did know that Judy & Duane were considering retirement this year when I made my decision and after much consideration I agreed. I agreed largely because it seemed like the right thing to do. Up until a few weeks ago, I couldn’t explain my decision any more specifically than that.

Here is what happened a few weeks ago. Judy gave a sermon based on Gandhi’s belief about the importance of worship with sacrifice — in fact Gandhi called it a social sin to worship “without” sacrifice. In street talk, I would say that Gandhi asks us to “walk the talk.” This sermon presented some exciting concepts and the requisite language for me to understand my own decision-making process. Gandhi’s ap-

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proach requires that we acknowledge what is sacred and then be willing to do what is needed to protect that sacredness.

In a nutshell, that is what I experienced. I was called to work together with all of you to protect our beloved UUCV. I won't go into details of what I sacrificed. but trust me when I tell you that I gave up some exciting plans. I'm saying that not to seek pity, but only to emphasize that our community at UUCV is much more important at this time.

Having gotten that out of the way, I will provide a snapshot of what we need to do to navigate our trip through the transition to eventually have a new called Minister at UUCV. Someone asked last week if our parent organization, UUA, provided guidelines. Let me show you what they start with. (Hold up stack of materials) These and more are on-line and I would be happy to give you the web site if you are interested in reading them.

Besides manuals, they provide consultation. Richard Speck, the District Executive of our district, talked with me at length on the phone on Friday— answering my questions and providing guidance. One of the points that he made very emphatically, is that, "In these circumstances, it is virtually essential that we hire an Interim Minister before we do a search for our Settled Minister." (He was referring to our having had only one ministry and that was for nearly 14 years.)

He said the rationale, based on much experience over time is compelling. He pointed out that for us to deal with our change process and then go through the steps that allow us to determine priorities for the next 15 years with a new minister, that we need to first have an Interim Minister. ----We will soon hold a congregational meeting to discuss this, and other transitional issues.

Assuming we have an Interim Minister, she or he would be hired by the board of trustees after reviewing three candidates who would be referred by the UUA's Transitions Office.

---There is a group of accredited interim ministers who have made a career specializing in transitional ministry. ---The interim would begin with us next August.

During the fall of the second year of interim ministry, the congregation would begin a full search. With the assistance of one of the region's Ministerial Settlement Representatives (MSR), the congregation would elect a search committee. The search committee would then work independently to select a candidate, who they would present to the congregation. Then the members of the congregation will vote on whether or not to call the candidate.

Now that some of you are glazed over with those specifics, let me shift perspectives and end with the big picture. First of all let us be mindful of using this 9 months wisely. Let's make good decisions so that at the end of this period we can celebrate our past and feel ready for our future. Our Interim Minister will help us get our house in order for the future. During this time we can clarify our wants and needs that will be the basis for calling a Minister. It is a logical and intelligent approach. We have good support from UUA and I am confident that with us working together we can make this a constructive process that will serve us far into the future.

The Rev. Judy Welles<sup>5</sup>

When we told you that we would be retiring from our ministry with you at the end of next June, Duane and I weren't sur-

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prised that many of you reacted with some version of “What happens after you go?” Of course that is the most natural reaction in the world. We’re leaving — then what?

This makes perfect sense. And as you’ve already heard, it’s the responsibility of your leadership to be thinking long-term about what the congregation needs for a good transition.

And it’s our responsibility, Duane’s and mine, to continue our ministry with you in the year to come so that we all arrive at the end of June feeling fulfilled and successful. We want to leave you on a high note, after a wonderful year, and the year to come is shaping up to be one of the best we’ve ever had. Together we are launching a church year that is looking so promising and rich that it almost makes me want to change my mind about retiring. Almost...

Let me tell you about some of what lies ahead for us in the months to come.

Our worship life together promises to deepen and become ever more fulfilling with a team of six Worship Associates, a growing choir, and an increasing number of talented member musicians. I’m thrilled with the creativity of the people working with us to plan worship! The new tradition of Story Sundays continues, the first one being offered next week — these are multi-generational services framed around a story and designed to engage people of all ages in a worship experience they will take home with them. David has composed a special choir anthem for next week’s service that will dance in your memories!

Today we begin a “happy new year,” as Willa puts it, with the Religious Education program. Your RE staff and committee have been hard at work over the summer to plan a great year for our children. We have a record number of volunteers who have committed to work with our children downstairs, while

the youth group continues the terrific momentum it built up last year under Nancy Bittinger's guidance.

Willa's training as an Interim Religious Education professional will equip her to set some things in motion for a strong transition when she leaves later next summer to move to St. Louis. (And by the way, she doesn't yet know when that will be, but she assures us that she will give plenty of notice so that there will be time for a good search process. For now, she is deeply engaged in her work with us and doing a great job.)

This is the year for Coming of Age, when our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders team up with an adult mentor to work through a year-long curriculum that will enhance their self-awareness as Unitarian Universalists. As we did two years ago, we plan to wrap up that program with a 4 or 5-day Boston Heritage trip in the late spring and a worship service conducted by the Coming of Age class.

We continue to try to meet the needs of our busy families for community-building and fellowship, and this year we're going to offer three Family Friday Nights with a prepared meal, a simple vespers worship service, and a choice of activities for all ages. Be sure to save the date of October 29 and read about it in the October newsletter — and remember that these events are for *everyone* in the UUCV family, not just parents with children living at home.

Sunday morning Adult Religious Education classes will continue, coordinated again this year by Julie Ham. Duane and I also have plans for several classes that we'll be offering on week nights. We begin this coming week with Roots and Branches for those considering membership in our congregation, and then Duane will continue with a seven-session class on liberal theology — remember to sign up to order the book if you want to participate. Starting in January I will once again

offer the End of Life Issues workshop to help people consider a variety of issues they might face as the end of their life approaches.

Our Small Group Ministry program is thriving, and the Board just made the SGM committee a committee of the Board, assuring that the program will not be as dependent on ministerial leadership and will continue through the transition.

And of course some other traditions will continue as well. We have a Day of the Dead service coming up, we'll do the usual Lessons and Carols for Christmas Eve and the Tolling of the Bells on the first Sunday in January. And since some of you have asked already — *yes* you are all invited to our Holiday Open House on the second Sunday of December!

This vision of the year ahead burns like a bright beacon of promise. Let our future begin and set our hearts on fire!