



# Bridging



March 2007

The Newsletter of the First Parish Church, Bridgewater, MA

## "The Meaning of Ministry"

As we know, ministry is central to congregational life in Unitarian Universalism. I am interested in the history of ministry and plan to specialize in the history of Universalist women in ministry in my doctoral study at Meadville Lombard Seminary in Chicago. Just to remind you, it was Universalist women in the nineteenth century—Olympia Brown and Phebe Hanaford as just two examples—who were among the first ordained women ministers in this country.

I suppose that ministry is on the minds of most members and friends of this congregation as you prepare for ministerial candidating week in early March. Choosing a minister and ordaining that person if not already ordained are some of the key responsibilities of congregational polity, the system of governance used in Unitarian Universalist churches. I hope each of you will contribute as much as you can during this important candidating period, details of which are explained elsewhere in this newsletter.

Ministry matters to a congregation. According to Webster, the word 'minister' has to do with serving, in various capacities: to serve others is 'to minister,' and the one offering service is 'a minister.' In our church system, the minister is the person or persons specially credentialed to provide spiritual, emotional, theological, perhaps also practical service in the way of leadership to congregations. It might be worth our reviewing some of the ways that ministers demonstrate their leadership qualifications to become a minister in the UUA.

Current requirements for UU ministry include a Masters degree from an accredited seminary or theological school, which takes on average three years of full-time study. Applicants for UU ministry must also complete at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, usually in a hospital setting. CPE is a time of great personal exploration as well as an experience of ministry outside a congregational setting. Candidates for parish ministry also complete an internship in a teaching church to learn the hands-on, daily ropes of ministry. All through the educational process, ministers-in-formation also undergo various emotional and psychological testing in addition to the many academic tests that are a standard part of course work.

Divinity degree in hand, a ministerial hopeful is invited into UUA fellowship after passing the oral examination administered by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, the MFC. Once in fellowship, an individual may be ordained—that is, declared a minister—in a number of ways: by a home congregation, by the congregation of first settlement, or by other congregations with particular ties to the minister. Separately from ordination, through the act of installation, a congregation and a minister articulate their commitment to each other. Ordination and installation are both marked by ritual: usually a worship service and accompanying hoopla. A minister can be both ordained and installed in one service, or the rituals can be independent of one another. — Remember to mark your calendars for June 10, when this congregation will ordain one of its members, Joanne Giannino, to ministry. Joanne was fellowshiped by the UUA last September.

One final word about ministry. The scope and meaning of ministry is changing. In the fall I preached about Shared Ministry, the notion that each of us—clergy and laity—has the potential to regard what we give to the church as ministry. Thinking of what each person gives as ministry supports the overall effectiveness of the minister's work. Shared ministry was a welcome idea to many in this congregation, and it can significantly change your mindset toward your church community. I hope each of you will share as much of yourself with this congregation as possible, especially during these all-important days of ministerial candidating.

See you in Church!

Rev. Barbara

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