



# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

A Place to Connect, Grow and Serve

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## Connecting with the Ministerial Search Committee: Congregational Survey

By Sarah Yue, MSC member

I grew up in a family, and in a community, where everyone knew each other's story. My parents, both descendants of Dutch immigrant farmers, were raised in the same small town in rural Iowa and were (friendly) academic rivals throughout their high-school and college years. Both chose careers in education – my dad as a college professor, my mom as an elementary-school teacher – and while they eventually moved to upstate New York for my dad's job, they remained close to their extended families and spent every summer and holiday back on the family farm. My sister and I grew up in a setting where everything was comfortable and familiar: we lived in the same house for our entire lives, attended the same schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade, and were members of a small and tight-knit church that was also filled with Dutch farm families. That's not to say that my parents didn't introduce us to a wider and more complicated world; we spent semesters in Israel and Europe, hosted an exchange student from the Dominican Republic, and helped sponsor a refugee family from Haiti. But within the warm, loving circle of my immediate family and community, the stories of our lives were largely the same. We shared the same background, lived by the same values, and based our sense of self on the cultural and religious traditions that we all had in common.



In my late twenties I fell in love, quite unexpectedly, with a man whose story is very different from my own. I'm white; he is a person of color. I'm a third-generation American; he was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the U.S. as a teenager. I come from a stable and nurturing family; he comes from a family that was torn apart by loss and divorce. I'm relatively outgoing; he is extremely shy. And perhaps most significantly, I am a lifelong Democrat and he is a committed Republican. Navigating these differences was a tremendous challenge at first, and even now, 13 years of marriage and three kids later, it continues to stretch us both. But as with everything worth fighting for, it has made us stronger. We've learned that the divergent stories we carry with us into our family structure don't have to conflict with each other, and one person's story does not have to dominate over the other. Instead, we can weave our stories together (painstakingly, sometimes painfully), creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. And over time we have learned how to honor and

respect the parts of each other's stories that we do not personally understand, even when that lack of understanding is scary.

At its best, UUCA is a grand tapestry woven from a multitude of different stories. Our new Senior Minister will have the awesome task of stewarding this tapestry, and the sacred responsibility of nurturing all of the threads within it. But in order for our tapestry to be as strong, and as beautiful, as it is meant to be, all of the different colors and sizes and textures and compositions of those threads need to be visible. In other words, the full range of stories within our community needs to be heard. One of my jobs on the Ministerial Search Committee is to provide a platform for all of you to share your stories: the gifts you bring to this congregation, the needs you hope will be met, and the dreams and ideas you have for the future of the church. In the spring of 2019, the MSC will release a congregational survey that we encourage everyone in the UUCA community - members, friends, inquiring friends, newcomers, youth – to complete. The survey will focus on three fundamental questions: Who are you? What is important to you? What are you looking for in a new Senior Minister? The MSC members are eager to read your responses – all of them – even (especially) the unvarnished, uncomfortably candid ones. You don't need to have all the answers about the future direction of our church (although we will welcome them if you do!); instead, what we need is your story: your own unique, beloved, perfectly imperfect thread within our UUCA tapestry.

I have experienced personally the joy that comes from successfully weaving together divergent personal stories. My biracial, bi-cultural children love both dim sum and Dutch pastries and enjoy initiating lively political debates, especially if they can get Mommy and Daddy to join in on opposite sides (which they usually can). Being part of a family with multiple stories has, in turn, become the new story that is shaping my children's lives. We in the MSC hope that you will share your diverse stories with us, both via the congregational survey and through a variety of in-person opportunities in the months to come, so that we can fully represent each of your threads in the complex, sometimes messy, but always lovely tapestry of UUCA.