

Rev Cathy Harrington
State of the Church UUCGT
June 6, 2021

When I arrived in the summer of 2019, I was no stranger to UUCGT. In 2004, a graduating seminarian at Starr King School for the Ministry, I was seeking my first settled ministry in Ludington, Michigan, and their search committee got to hear me preach my first sermon in your pulpit. There were two services back then, and when I stumbled over my words during the Time for All Ages, I joked, “Well, I’m not nervous!” and everyone laughed. I relaxed and things went well. Over the years, I had meaningful collegial relationships with your ministers and interim ministers over the years, and I will never forget that Kevin Tarsa and John Schneider brought your amazing choir to sing at my daughter Leslie’s Celebration of Life, seven months after her sudden and tragic death. Yes, you have had a special place in my heart for many reasons and for many years. When I saw that you were in need of an interim minister, it felt right for me to apply.

One of my first tasks as your interim minister was to officiate at UUCGT Co-founder Mary Anne Force’s Memorial Service. You trusted me with that sacred task, and I saw firsthand and was deeply moved by how you lovingly cared for one another. From there, as I worked through the standard interim tasks, I worried that two years would not be enough. There was a lot of stuff to work through, painful memories, disappointments, and unresolved conflict. Founded as a fellowship in the sixties with over forty years of lay-led ministry, moving to full-time professional ministerial leadership couldn’t help but be challenging. Your first settled minister, also a brand-new minister, Rev. Emmy Lou Belcher understood this. She loved you and guided you through many milestones including the construction of your beautiful church building. Emmy Lou generously nurtured and welcomed the unique gifts of your talented volunteer music director, Kevin Tarsa. Eventually recognized as a treasure, Kevin was ordained as your music minister and later pursued professional UU ministry at Meadville Lombard Theological School. I even had the privilege of being a mentor to Kevin through a part of his process. So, you can add this to your accomplishments (and there are many); you acknowledged and grew a UU minister from scratch. The Rev. Kevin Tarsa is one of the most gifted and talented ministers in our Unitarian Universalist movement.

Your liberal religious presence and witness in Grand Traverse County has changed lives and continues to touch more people’s lives than you can ever know. Your presence mattered then, it matters now, and as an established and credible liberal religious presence, you will be called to lead the charge to change systemic racism and counter oppression as our nation works to create a just society in our lifetime. I have no doubt that you will show up and help lead the way.

During our time together, you have worked hard to move forward with faith in your future and have succeeded in calling a settled minister who brings many gifts and talents. Alex Jensen has packed a lot of life and learning into his 25 years of living and has approached every endeavor with commitment, diligence and passion. Becoming an Eagle Scout is no small accomplishment, it takes years of hard work, service, and determination. The list of famous Eagle Scouts is quite impressive. Check it out! <https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2018/02/08/famous-former-scouts/>

Here are a few interesting facts about Eagle Scouts.

181 NASA astronauts were involved in Scouting (57.4 percent of astronauts) — 39 are Eagle Scouts. 36.4 percent of the United States Military Academy (West Point) cadets were involved in Scouting as youth — 16.3 percent of cadets are Eagle Scouts — 12.5 percent of male senators are Eagle Scouts.

There have been many changes at UUCGT in my tenure, personnel, small groups, etc., and I'll share more during the service on June 6. But what hasn't changed is the original commitment of the founders to Unitarian Universalist values and principles. Ministers come and go, but the soul of a congregation remains and grows. Some congregations are self-absorbed and reluctant to change, therefore limiting possibility and potential. But others accept the call to live in the tension of change and accept the sacred responsibility to use our privilege and power to fight injustice and give voice to those whose voices historically have been silenced in our society. This call to serve is what I've seen in you. Since George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis by police officer, Derek Chauvin, with hearts broken open you have had the willingness to do the difficult work of peeling away the layers of unconscious racism to understand the systemic and debilitating nature of white supremacy. Journeying with so many of you in the Reading & Writing Whiteness book groups, Alison and I have been deeply moved by your willingness to be vulnerable, honest and open to learning and letting go. This is one of the many gifts I will take with me to my next congregation who will likely find themselves in that liminal place of disappointment, anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and hope. And we survived the pandemic together! When asked where I was during the Pandemic, I will say, "I was held in Beloved Community with the people of the UU Congregation of Grand Traverse."

I will always be grateful for what I have learned from you and will carry you in my heart always.

With deep gratitude and love,

Cathy