

From Your Minister

By the time you read this article, the second half of my sabbatical will have begun. The first half of the sabbatical was in the spring of 2016.

The offer of sabbatical is a tradition in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Recognition of the need for renewal and reflection by ministers is acknowledged in the process of calling a minister and included in the letter of agreement offered by the congregation.

You may remember that I chose to split the accrued six months of sabbatical time. I believed spreading the time out over two church years would be best for the congregation. We all know the expression, "life is what happens while you're busy making plans." Upon return from the first part of my sabbatical, we learned that our Office Administrator of 20 years had decided to retire. Thinking it better that I stay through the transition from Deedee's retirement, I postponed the second half of the sabbatical. I am looking forward to the long awaited completion of the sabbatical time.

I used the first half of the sabbatical to expand my knowledge of something that for me is a spiritual practice and also connects me with a community of friends outside of the congregation. I was intentional about discovering who I am beyond my previous roles of wife, mother, daughter, and caregiver. I used the time to engage more fully in spiritual practice and to enhance relationships with the wider Huntsville community. The second half will be a continued discernment of how to grow spiritually and emotionally through things I have always loved, such as travel, learning about and experiencing new cultures, reflecting on personal and family of origin history, and dance.

I have booked overseas travel which includes visiting significant religious and sacred sites, as well as personal spiritual exploration. I am particularly excited to finally be traveling to France to visit the famous Chartres Cathedral, designated a World Heritage Site by Unesco. The cathedral is the home of the world's most recognized labyrinth. Pilgrims have been going to Chartres to walk this labyrinth for over 1000 years. During my ministerial internship in Memphis, I attended a retreat on the use of the labyrinth as a spiritual tool, led by the Reverend Lauren Artress, of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. Since that time, I have wanted to experience walking the labyrinth at Chartres.

I shared some personal reflection from the first part of my sabbatical in a sermon a few weeks ago. The Department of Ministry of the UUA acknowledges that, "The sabbatical, as an extended leave from normal duties, enables the minister not only to experience rest and recreation but the renewal that follows detachment, reflection, and new learnings; renewal that brings fresh enthusiasm, new ideas, and a clearer focus to the relationship." As I contemplate the next half of the sabbatical time, I am already aware of new insights made possible by the earlier three months of rest, recreation, and renewal. As I recently told the board, I look forward to a conversation with all of you, as we reflect on insights gained during the sabbatical time, and the significance of these insights to the future of our shared ministry at UUCH.

When I returned from the first part of the sabbatical, the Worship Chair remarked that things went so smoothly, they hardly noticed I was gone. I have done everything possible to make sure that is the case again. Many of my UU colleagues, as well as friends in the community, have responded positively to my invitation to be guest speakers in my absence. The Worship Committee, chaired by Amanda Schuber, and our Professional Staff will continue to provide quality worship every Sunday. Bobby Hall has agreed to be the liaison with our guest speakers. John Czachurski will help coordinate Pastoral Care, along with our excellent Care Committee, chaired by Barbara Hitt. John will always have information about when and how to reach me, and will be able to contact me should the need arise. Our Board and Council members are all prepared to carry on with the administrative and organizational tasks, as well as the many regularly scheduled church activities. I am confident you are in good hands.

The sabbatical is not only for the professional minister. It is also a time for a congregation and its leaders to reflect on the ministry of the congregation. May we all be enriched by this experience.

In Love and Hope,
Rev. Alice