

Words of Inspiration, August 2, 2015

Collaboration & Community

MARÍA MCCABE:

I'VE BEEN FRETTING LATELY. I AM PRONE TO FRETTING – IT'S PART OF MY PERSONALITY – BUT IT GETS WORSE WHEN I'M TIRED AND IT GETS WORSE WHEN CHANGE IS IN THE AIR. MOSTLY I FRET BECAUSE I CAN'T VISUALIZE EXACTLY HOW EVERYTHING IS GOING TO GO. (AND BY THAT I USUALLY MEAN THAT I KNOW I WON'T BE ABLE TO CONTROL HOW EVERYTHING IS GOING TO GO.) OR ELSE I FRET BECAUSE I FEEL INSECURE. I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO IT. I WON'T BE ENOUGH. I WILL DISAPPOINT OTHERS.

MY MONKEY MIND STARTS TO TOSS AND TWIST AROUND WHATEVER THE ISSUE IS AND, WELL, YOU KNOW, IT DOESN'T GET BETTER ANYTIME SOON.

I'VE BEEN FRETTING ABOUT THIS MINISTRY TRANSITION HERE AT RESTORATION. FRETTING ABOUT SCHEDULES AND GOALS. FRETTING ABOUT THE LOGISTICS. FRETTING ABOUT HOW IT'S GOING TO BE TO BE A STUDENT CHAPLAIN AT EINSTEIN HOSPITAL, THE BUSIEST EMERGENCY ROOM IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA. HOW WILL I MAKE SURE MIKE IS TAKEN CARE OF WHILE I AM ON MY TWICE-MONTHLY OVERNIGHT SHIFTS AT THE HOSPITAL? HOW AM I GOING TO GET ENOUGH SLEEP? SHOULD I TRY TO SCHEDULE MY OVERNIGHTS FOR WEEKENDS THAT I ALREADY PLAN TO BE IN PHILADELPHIA?

IF THEY GAVE MEDALS FOR FRETTING, I WOULD ACE THE COMPETITION. I LOOK AT MY DEAR COLLEAGUE KATHY, AND I LOOK AT ALL OF YOU AND I AM SO EXCITED THAT MY STOMACH IS CHURNING BUT I JUST

CAN'T VISUALIZE EXACTLY HOW EVERYTHING IS GOING TO GO.

I MAILED OFF MY BIG ENVELOPE WITH THE FIRST INSTALLMENT OF EVERYTHING I NEED TO SUMIT TO THE MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE TO SCHEDULE MY BIG APPOINTMENT, AND I STARTED TO CRY. MY INTERNSHIP IS OVER AND A NEW CHAPTER IS STARTING. IT IS SO STRANGE TO REALIZE THAT EVERYTHING I HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO ACHIEVE IS COMING TO FRUITION! IT'S STARTING TO GET VERY REAL.

AND I'M REALIZING THAT *EVERYTHING* SACRED IS STOMACH-CHURNING. I'M REALIZING THAT AT LEAST FOR ME, THE SACRED ALWAYS SETS MY MIND TO RACING. AND THIS MINISTRY TRANSITION? IT'S ABOUT SOMETHING FUNDAMENTALLY SACRED.

I LOOK UP "SHARED MINISTRY" ON THE UUA WEBSITE AND FOUND THIS WONDERFUL REPORT PUT TOGETHER BY LREDA, THE ASSOCIATION OF LIBERAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS. IT SPOKE OF "SACRED COLLABORATION" AND HOW UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM IS ALL ABOUT *TRANSFORMING* HUMAN LIVES.

I CAN FRET ABOUT THE DETAILS, AND I CAN WORRY ABOUT HOW EXACTLY EVERYTHING IS GOING TO WORK OUT. I CAN'T STO MYSELF FROM FRETTEING ND WORRYING, AND TRUTHFULLY, SOMEBODY HAS TO WORRY ABOUT ALL THAT STUFF BECAUSE OTHERWISE IT WON'T GET DONE.

BUT THE REAL ESSENCE OF EVERYTHING WE DO HERE IS THE SACRED WORK OF MINISTRY. FROM INVOKING SPIRIT INTO OUR WORSHIP SPACE, TO MAKING AN AGENDA FOR BOARD MEETINGS, TO MAKING THE COFFEE ON SUNDAY MORNING.

ALL OF US, KATHY, MY, ALL OF YOU WHO ARE HERE AND NOT HERE TODAY – TOGETHER WE HAVE ALREADY CREATED A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THIS NEW CHAPTER IN THIS COMMUNITY.

WE HAVE DISAGREED AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO DISAGREE. WE HAVE GOTTEN MAD AT EACH OTHER AND WE HAVE DISAPPOINTED EACH OTHER.

WHEN I READ THOSE WORDS AND THEN SAT WITH KATHY TO DRAFT OUR COVENANT, EVERYTHING FELT LIKE IT HAD FALLEN INTO PLACE. WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW THE SCHEDULE IS GOING TO WORK. WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW EVERY TASK IS GOING TO GET DONE. BUT WE KNOW EACH OTHER AND WE KNOW YOU. AND YOU KNOW US. AND WE KNOW THAT EMBRACING ALL SOULS AND RESTORING WHOLENESS IS WHAT THIS COMMUNITY IS ALL ABOUT. AND WE KNOW THAT EVERYTHING WE DO HERE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO *TRANSFORM LIVES*.

Kathryn Ellis:

This morning, we celebrate the completion of María's internship with us. She has worked hard, and she is no longer a student. María is a minister! For the last 6 weeks, she was Restoration's Summer minister.

We celebrate that María will continue her ministry with Restoration as Director of Community and Social Justice Ministries. Since she hasn't completed all the Unitarian Universalist requirements for ministerial fellowship, María won't be ordained this year. But I see and experience María as a full ministerial partner. We have already evolved a shared ministry with each other and with you. Our collaboration in community with each other and with you will continue to grow and change. Together, we'll see how things work, and I am excited about the possibilities in our ongoing ministry.

As you have already seen, María and I share some significant personality traits, and we are significantly different. María says she frets. I guess I do that too, but in different ways. María maybe experiences more anxiety and wants to know how things will go. She says hopes to control things. The way I grew up, I never thought that I could control things! When I am at my worst, I am more likely

to be depressed and to be sure that I am not good enough!

So, I want to say to María, minister to minister, some wisdom that was passed on to me, “You are enough and you are not alone.” The Shared Ministry document that María found stated:

In shared ministry, we work together to bring out the best in one another. For (religious) professionals, an abundantly life-giving shared ministry is covenantal, contextual, and developmental.

In other words, we make sacred promises to one another as part of this community and we expect growth and change. This week, María and I created a covenant for our work together. We began by acknowledging that we were already in covenant with each other as professional colleagues through the Unitarian Universalists Ministers Association and through the Restoration Covenant as members of this community.

Covenant is important for our faith. We don't agree to a dogma. We make promises to one another. As Unitarian Universalists, we are a covenanted community. A covenant is a sacred promise; we promise each other mutuality. Covenant promises are sacred, serious promises. They are not always easy to keep, but they reflect our best selves, our best intentions. They require us to be attentive, to recall our promises and to stay present when things are difficult.

Reverend Alice Blair Wesley, a wise retired Unitarian Universalist minister, rewrote in contemporary language the covenant that the pilgrims (our Unitarian Universalist ancestors) made with each other:

We pledge to walk together
in the ways of truth and affection,
as best we know them now
as we may learn them in the days to come
that we and our children may be fulfilled
and that we may speak to the world
in words and actions of good will.¹

Notice that they do not promise perfection and they recognize that change will come. They promise to be religious and spiritual companions. Rev. Gordon McKeeman wrote, “Universalists believe that all of us are going to end up together in heaven, so we might as well learn how to get along with each other now.”

At Restoration, we have articulated our covenant. In the first part of our promises, we promise to abide in friendship, to build a diverse and multicultural Beloved Community and to resolve our misunderstandings in a spirit of cooperation and accountability. We promise to stay faithful to our community, to restore our community when it needs restoration and to restore our souls

together. We intend to “Embrace All Souls and Restore Wholeness.” This is sacred, transformative ministry for all of us. María and I would like to share our new covenant with you.

María and Kathy:

As colleagues who serve the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, we declare our intention to act in ways that promote the well-being and the mission of the church. As agents of spiritual transformation, we lead in relationship. Ours is a covenantal relationship in that it calls us to walk together and work together in humility with a sense of call, with respect for one another's human dignity, with humor, courage, and a sense of adventure and of the possible. In shared ministry we work together to bring out the best in one another. The purpose of this covenant is to benefit the UU Church of the Restoration, and for the mutual empowerment of our evolving ministries.

We embrace what the future holds in store for us as colleagues and for this beloved congregation. We also recognize and pledge to uphold the covenant between us as members of the UU Ministers Association, and the covenant developed by our congregation. The covenant we are making here is intended to set expectations, and provide clear guidelines for our ongoing ministerial partnership.

Specifically, we covenant to:

- Recognize and celebrate the unique identity, strengths, needs and challenges of this congregation;
- Support and affirm each other's gifts and ministries;
- Give each other the gift of deep listening to one another's stories and truths, allowing for space to be fully ourselves in relationship;
- Maintain strong, clear and honest communication with one another and with lay leadership in the congregation, making it a priority to meet weekly and in person whenever possible;
- Make appropriate use of District, UUA, and other outside resources;
- Wholeheartedly serve the mission of this church with grace and gratitude.

So. Let us not break the circle of enabling love, welcome and forgiveness.

Amen. Ashe. Blessed Be.

¹ Quoted in Tom Owen-Towle. “Covenant” in *Theology Ablaze*. San Diego, CA: Flaming Chalice Press, 2011, p. 49.