

Call to Ministry

My first recollection of my call to ministry was in the first grade at Mount Merici Academy. Nearing the end of my first grade year after attending mass every Wednesday and enjoying religion class daily, I decided I wanted to be a Catholic priest. Monday through Friday I was Catholic and on Sundays I was Episcopal. It all seemed possible at 7 years old; I had missed some of the finer details that would snag up this plan a little later on, like I was Episcopal and a girl!

As I entered my teen years, St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Waterville became a greater focus for me. Early in my teens I became the first girl acolyte, still not imagining that my early dream of being a priest was an option. During these years my focus became surviving middle and high school without the grounding of my Catholic school community. Eventually, I found another island of support working at Burger King. A relief from trying to fit in, we all wore the same outfit and in some ways we were a pretty diverse group with a central focus, getting the job done.

Years passed and I found myself leaving high school half a year early to go to college. Almost by default I ended up in the Human Services program in Gerontology in Bangor, Maine because they had rolling admission and the program began the January before my high school graduation. I was fueled with determination to succeed at college after running into some educational roadblocks on the way in high school. Enjoying school, I continued onward eventually completing my Masters in Social Work. The seeds of becoming a priest lay dormant and the seeds of ministering through my professional social work career and lay ministry at First Universalist Church, Auburn, Maine blossomed.

My social work practice along with participation in social justice activities nourished my call to ministry for many years. As time went on however, I felt nudged back to my call to professional ministry and I called the UUA to inquire. This was 15 years ago. The person on the phone asked what I had been up to, I explained my profession and they asked; "If you're already working with people, why do you want to be a minister?" ... I'm sure I said something but in reality I went blank, I didn't have an answer. The next part of sorting out my call began.

When asked to serve in church leadership, I said yes, when interested in serving, I asked. I fell in love with the opportunities and experiences and particularly enjoyed the Beyond Categorical Thinking work. Clarity occurred over this time as I began differentiating between the parts of social work that were ministerial and how ministry holds all of life's processes, rooted in theological history, evolution and community. And this moves the time clock up to the year 2012. I want to be a Unitarian Universalist minister!

I didn't call the UUA this time, I just started the process. People in my life thought I'd cracked up; a successful social work practice, flexible hours, lots of gardening and contemplation time. The Unitarian Universalist aspirant process began. I completed the career assessment before applying to seminary, just in case they could convince me that this was not a good plan; they didn't. They did however have a few recommendations, three that I initially mentioned as personal goals: do CPE, go to Seminary, continue in daily prayer and invest in an exercise program, continue with support system and begin spiritual direction. Ok, now I was really going to have to start exercising and figure out what spiritual direction was and that is what I did.

Hours and days went by during times of challenge that I reflected back with gratitude for the push to begin both the exercise program and spiritual direction. These with my ongoing personal spiritual practice, ongoing supportive relationships have sustained me during my mother's stroke and recovery and eventually her broken hip and continuing recovery. Without these self-care activities and enduring friendships and relationships, completing seminary would not have been possible.

... And now it is 2017, seminary is complete, internship is half way done and I'm stepping into ministry in ways I could not have imagined at 7 years old.