



October 1, 2020

Dear members and friends of UUSGS:

I usually start writing these letters each year by looking back at letters from previous years. I'm struck this year by how much has changed. But also by how much remains.

There is something durable about our ministry, something that remains even when the tides of life create churn all around us. This congregation, founded in the early 19th century, has been this way for some time. This isn't the first pandemic UUSGS has survived (though our name has evolved a few times since then). Our ministry has been active during times of war and peace, prosperity and depression... times of towering moral leadership and times when the public demanded more.

Put simply, Unitarian Universalist ministry in the Pioneer Valley is durable, because of us. We've been through it before, and we'll get through it again. Whatever the next year brings, we'll get through it. We'll get through it together. And when people look back on this time we were given, my hope is that they will see a congregation that responded faithfully to the challenges and opportunities of their time.

A congregation so rooted in its values - as expressed in our history and in the future we make together - that we did what it took to remain relevant, vibrant, durable, and rooted.

What must it have meant for people to do Unitarian and Universalist ministry in the days of emancipation and civil war? What do you think it felt like to build a historic new building in 1869? Some of you - our beloved elders (like it or not!) - were here when our congregation responded to the movement for Civil Rights, to the Vietnam War, to nuclear proliferation, to the changing shape of this local community we have served for so long.

This is a time to dig deep on who we are, as individuals and as a gathered community. Some among us are motivated by our past. Some, by our future. Some, in adapting to the needs of the present. Whatever calls to you today in our shared ministry, I want to say to you clearly: the soil is rich, the water is warm, the time is right yet again for a faithful response and faithful vision.

What does it mean to be a congregation for the 21st century? What does it mean to connect people using technology with those who will gather in person? A recent memorial service held online was able to welcome international participation. New members welcomed earlier this year include several wonderful people who have never set foot on our physical property. Clearly, the ways that we connect are evolving.

What does it mean to approach our building and grounds through an evolved lens of public health? How might we deepen connections to our natural setting and to the arts, while providing safe ways to gather in person when the time is right? How might our physical structure more fully express values like inclusion and justice, liberation and joy?

I've been inspired these past months - months of hardship for many, for sure - by the many creative conversations I've witnessed. Conversations about our commitment to anti-racism, justice, and inclusion. Conversations about how to care and connect as a congregation, while still keeping each other safe. Conversations about innovation in the midst of what we all likely have experienced at least somewhat as deprivation. Conversations about how to sustain - and even grow! - the life-giving shared ministry we've built together. Even in challenging times.

Perhaps *especially* in challenging times. I believe we have an opportunity here. An opportunity to make real impact. An opportunity to chart a new path, drawing upon our congregation's history of entrepreneurship and faithful leadership. An opportunity to respond out of that which is durable in each of us to ensure that the ministry we make is at least as durable.

We Seymours have raised our annual contribution. We do this incrementally each year, but we've taken a bigger step than we might have otherwise this year. Because the need is great. And so is this opportunity. I hope you will consider joining me and my family in doing what you can.

The words that have been ringing in my ears lately are: "don't go back to Egypt!" (Thinking of the Exodus story, when in the midst of the difficult journey, there was surely temptation to go back to how it was, instead of moving forward faithfully together.) There are those who have spurned public health already to rush back to "how it was." There are those who, when we gather in person again, will want it to be just the same as it was.

But Egypt meant bondage. Dorothy herself was changed when she returned to Kansas; she saw it with new eyes. Even when we are free from the pandemic, let's not simply go back to what was. Let's be better. Let's learn during this time. Let's serve and connect in new ways, ways that we can carry forward. Let's raise our stewardship game. Let's raise our caring game. Let's dig deep into our core values and find creative new ways to manifest them.

Innovation takes time. Innovation takes money and resources and vision. Innovation takes a commitment to dialog. Innovation requires that we make mistakes.

May this time be a time of innovation for you, and for us. May you find new ways to connect with what is most important. May you find new ways to serve others, and to serve a Love that is bigger than any of us and leaves no one out. May we find new ways to love every hell out of this world, and new ways to appreciate heaven always and already in our midst.

Rock on, dear ones. Truly, rock on. Though I grew up playing jazz, I found deep connection in punk and ska music... genres that, like the blues, draw their power from challenge and hardship. May we be a people so bold.

Rock on.

Sincerely yours,



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A few upcoming dates & links:

- You can register a **pledge** for 2021 online by clicking here:
<https://uuspringfield.breezechms.com/form/pledge2021>
- Budget listing sessions will occur (online) on October 11th and 14th. More information and meeting links can be found out our congregational calendar here:
<https://www.uuspringfield.org/events-calendar/>
- The congregation's **Annual Meeting** will occur online on Saturday, November 14th. Meeting packets will be distributed a week in advance. In addition to voting on a 2021 budget, new Trustees, and social justice teams... we will also hear an update - a Sneak Peak - at what the Chalice Lighters capital campaign planning team has been up to. An exciting time to be celebrating and planning for the future!