

One Spiritual Practice for Community Ministers: Equipping the Saints - Part I

By Rev. Cat Cox

UUSCM Good Officer

I've always loved the expression "Equipping the saints for ministry." To me it evokes the core assertion of the Protestant Reformation at the center of our Unitarian Universalist heritage: there is no requirement necessary for a direct relationship with the Divine - and no mediator required either! It was Martin Luther who first spoke of "the priesthood of all believers" and Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams extended this to "the priesthood and the prophethood of all believers." Yes to that!

Take a moment to think about how brilliant, evocative and empowering this idea really is. What if we lived our shared commitment to the values of this faith with the passion, fierceness and (yes!) joy of a wild-eyed saint following a vision in everything we do? What might we accomplish together if we had that courageous willingness to challenge the status quo wherever and whenever it is not life-giving? Being a saint, after all, has nothing to do with being boring, boxed in or "saintly."

This is the radical idea that underlies the vision of UUSCM: to bring together community ministers who serve in a wide variety of settings and who bring different levels of professional preparation, skill, credentialing, vocational commitment and specialization.

UUSCM has always recognized and supported the meaningful distinctions between lay, ordained and fellowshiped ministers for the best of all possible reasons: these distinctions let us see clearly what each of us can best contribute to whatever work we undertake, individually and together. They facilitate the ways we can work effectively to stand together on the side of love bringing healing and justice to the brokenness of this world.

The paradox is that the more fully we embrace the vision of "the priesthood and the prophethood of all believers" -- that is, the more fully we empower our lay ministries and encourage (ideally!) ALL our members to think of themselves in these terms -- the more we empower the ministries of our clergy as well. We create and support the vibrant, creative, working partnerships between lay and clergy leaders that (trust me on this!) is among the dearest dreams of every ordained minister I've ever known or worked with, whether parish or community based.

As the cultural religious landscape tilts inescapably towards more diffuse networks of spiritually meaningful connections rather than, as formerly, being identified with a single localized congregation, envisioning and building alliances between lay and ordained ministries will be ever more crucial to our relevance.

The (still!) radical 500-year-old idea of equipping the saints for ministry may finally be coming of age! Think about it. Invite conversations about it! We are - together - the saints we have been looking for!

Next time: Surprising spiritual practices for equipping the saints!

Blessings on Your Ministry -
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