

COMMUNITY MINISTRY:
An Opportunity for Renewal and Change

A Report on
Research and Reflection
by the
Starr King Community Ministry Project

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PREFACE

In 1991 the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association voted to establish community ministry as a category for fellowship. With this action the Association committed itself to an understanding of ministry that departs from tradition and moves into something new.

In the summer of 1994, a group of people came together at Starr King School for the Ministry to reflect on the advent of community ministry as a category for fellowship. We sought to place community ministry in the context of theology, history, and polity, and to interpret its significance for Unitarian Universalism.

We hope the following materials will be of use to congregations interested in supporting community ministry, to individuals considering community ministry as a calling, and to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and the Department of Ministry as they seek to advance the work of our Association.

What we present here is a work in progress about community ministry, which is itself a work in progress. We hope these materials will contribute to an ongoing conversation, and wish to register our gratitude for the depth of vision and hope we have encountered among those involved in community ministry.

Most of all we hope to amplify a vision of the purpose of the church and its ministry, which community ministry expresses and which we believe holds promise to deepen and focus the mission of Unitarian Universalism.

This preface contains a statement of our consensus conclusions and a summary of the "talking points" that we believe warrant further study and conversation.

Following this preface is a collection of five papers that form the background of our conclusions. The first, by Tawna Nicholas Cooley, seeks to address the question, "Why this, why now?" and to place community ministry within the living tradition of Unitarian Universalism and a broader ecumenical context. The second, "A Hand Is Laid Upon Us", by Rebecca Parker, seeks to identify the theological affirmations implicit in community ministry and to note the changing understanding of the purpose of the church and the meaning of ordination that flows from these theological affirmations. The third, by Gail Collins-Ranadive, is a personal reflection. The fourth, by Barbara Child, is a concise history of the Society for the Larger Ministry, which makes visible the passionate people who have advocated for this

advance in our movement. The last, by Mary Harrington, notes the multiple musings and questions that recurred in our conversations.

Our collection concludes with a bibliography of materials we have drawn on, and recommend to others for further study.

A Call to A New Sense of Mission

Community ministry represents a critical opportunity for renewal and positive change within Unitarian Universalism.

First of all, the advent of community ministry calls Unitarian Universalists to a fresh and radical understanding of the mission of the church. The fellowshipping of community ministers has begun at a time when there has been an increasing tendency among liberals to be silent in the public sphere, or to act individually but not collectively. Some of our congregations find themselves to be primarily focused inward, concerned with ministry to one another in a way that emphasizes the blessing of a loving fellowship, but may miss the call of the larger world.

The community ministry movement is prophetic. It calls us to a larger world and senses that world not simply as a place in which we are called to serve but as a place that is permeated with the presence of the sacred. In his narrative of the passion that moved early activists for community ministry, Ron Engel writes,

"We were concerned to affirm a radical this-worldly model of religious understanding that began with the world, saw the divine at work within the world, creating, sustaining, and redeeming it, and called the church to witness to that saving reality...The world is filled with sacred centers, and it is the mission of the church to identify, celebrate, and serve the creativity of those places."

This image of the purpose of the church calls us to be witnesses to a life-giving spirit at work in all of life. It pushes beyond our familiar understanding of congregations as sacred centers, sanctuaries for the spirit, in which we receive nurture and fellowship that sustain us as we move out into the world to be of service. While our congregations offer this (and helpfully so), the community ministry movement places our congregations within a larger sense of mission, and releases our congregations to a larger sense of mission. It asks us to begin not with the importance of religious community for us, but with an affirmation of sacred power present in all of life. It reminds us that our religious communities exist not for us and our needs alone. They exist to witness to the holy at work in the midst of life, and to be of service to the "spirit of life",

which some call God.

A radical yes to "something far more deeply interfused" (Wordsworth) -- a benevolence, a grace, an urge toward wholeness and freedom, a power that holds life and death together, a Love that redeems -- such an affirmation is not new to Unitarian Universalism. What is new is our willingness to establish a practice that embodies this affirmation in our institutional life. By ordaining and fellowshiping people to Community Ministry, we believe that we have moved in a direction that gains meaning as it is understood as a theological affirmation of the presence of God in all of life.

A Call to Re-imagine Ordained Ministry

Secondly, the movement for community ministry asks us to take a fresh look at the practice of ordaining and fellowshiping ministers. In our tradition, ordination has been understood in relational and functional terms. The relationship between minister and people is the heart of the matter. The functions of ministerial leadership, classically, are preaching, teaching, administration, and pastoral care.

The New England Puritans, whose practices have continued to be the basic guide in our understanding of the ordained ministry, saw ministry as practical and useful. They guarded against the abuses of church hierarchy by insisting that the faithful themselves had the power to choose who would lead them, and they tended to downplay a sacramental or priestly understanding of ministry, which they also had seen abused.

Community ministry pushes beyond our traditional understanding of the minister and people facing one another in the intimate circle of congregational life. It embodies the vision of ordained ministers placed in settings beyond the congregation, where their work is witnessing to and assisting the "powers that are creative and sustaining and transforming, not ultimately of our making but rather gifts." (James Luther Adams)

Our traditional understandings of the ordained ministry provide some basis for community-based ministries; but these old wine skins cannot completely hold this new wine. We are pushed to think in different ways about ordination.

The truth is, our thinking around the meaning of ordination has become rather fuzzy. In practice, ordination, though celebrated with fervor and often great pomp and circumstance, has tended to mean whatever we want it to mean. A measure of jubilant chaos seems to characterize our celebrative practices.

Community ministry either uncritically departs from the historic meaning of ordination in our polity or it invites us to

fresh clarity and focus. Perhaps it suggests that we turn our attention to a sacramental or charismatic understanding of ministry. This view of ordination emphasizes the ordained person as one in whom the light shines, one who makes visible the presence of Love, one who is a living witness to holiness and happiness, spiritual strength or maturity, one whose touch recalls to us that there is a ground to our being which we can trust.

This understanding has had some history with us, particularly in our recognition that those we ordain minister not only by what they do, but by who they are. Exemplary or inspiring character has been important to us. Community ministry invites us to open this door further. It challenges us to a fresh articulation of the meaning of ordination, and perhaps to an expanded one.

A Call to Bless the Places of Disquiet

Thirdly, community ministry asks us to recognize the religious significance of the liminal space occupied by community ministers. Liminal experiences are those that occur at points or times of transition, and are often experiences in which transformation or revelation occurs. In one family's life the liminal times are the times of birth and death, marriage, loss, departure, return. They are the times of disruption and insight, vulnerability, richness of contrasting emotions, and sometimes, stunning clarity.

Ministers and priests have often been those whose work is to attend to human beings as they move through liminal times. But community ministers enter into liminality as the place of their vocation. Neither totally within the sanctuary of religious community, nor totally immersed in the secular world, they live and work in a space in between. Through them our religious community places itself in liminal space. These places of tension, transformation, and insight call for spiritual attentiveness, and practical religiosity. They are not theoretical and not secure. Community ministers exemplify the calling to live attentive to the spirit in the midst of the world as it is, especially in life's places of pain, loss, oppression, and struggle.

A Call to Elegant Simplicity

Finally, community ministry challenges our Association to strengthen its capacity to create and sustain institutional structures and practices that support the mission of the church. We see that it is easy for us to miss the significance of creating congruence between our deepest religious convictions and our institutional forms and practices. Organized religion is

quite capable of shooting itself in the foot. Careless practices around the ordained ministry obscure our witness. Instead of celebrating the presence of the sacred in life, our rules and regulations, gatekeeping and requirements, can beat down the spirit, fence it in, confuse it, block it, or obscure it.

People of religious sensitivity can find themselves feeling beleaguered, worn out, or distracted by an institutional church inattentive to love, grace, passion and holy power at work in the world. The strength of the vision and hope at work in the passion for community ministry asks the best of us institutionally.

But, it is possible for this vision to be lost, even by its advocates. On one level the embrace of community ministry may represent nothing more than the willingness of the General Assembly to concede to arguments of unjust treatment. Advocates of community ministry have made the case that those who have served in settings other than the parish have been denied recognition that their work is valid ministry. Unitarian Universalists are very responsive to claims and concerns regarding unjust treatment, and are quick to act to assure fairness and inclusiveness. If this is all that we have done, we have missed the movement of the spirit and captured nothing of enduring value in our institutional commitments and need to move beyond a misplaced conviction that the human need for recognition and affirmation is a right that must not be denied.

Our sense of community ministry hears a call for something more -- a call to elegant simplicity in our institutional life. Institutional elegance embodies religious vision and sensitivity in clear and useful forms. It creates ways for the humanly religious activities of praise and lament, compassion and justice making, truth speaking and reconciliation to take place unhindered by distractions. Simple, clear institutional policies and practices liberate us to carry out these religious activities with consistent attention and care.

The Underlying Call

The community ministry movement is an indication of a need for Unitarian Universalists to broaden and deepen our understanding of church and being religious in the world. For congregations and the denomination to respond to this underlying call will be instrumental in bringing fundamental shifts towards a Unitarian Universalist recognition of a larger or universal church and towards greater desire for embodiment of the liberal religious tradition in the world.

Talking Points

Community ministry raises questions. Here are some we found

ourselves coming back to again and again:

The Wisdom of Multiple Tracks: We now have three tracks of ministry in our Association. Can you heal a splintered and fragmented society with a splintered and fragmented approach to ministry? How do we embody the wholeness we seek to support in society? Are the multiple tracks a strategy for advocating important developments in our sense of mission (religious education, the world at large), that we will soon want to eliminate? Has our polity been a tool for advocacy? Is there a better way to advance our sense of mission?

The Centrality of the Parish: While community ministry asks us to attend to a larger sense of the religious as an aspect of everyone's life, and the sacred as honored and served in many centers, affirming community ministry does not mean we should neglect the importance of congregations. The challenge is, how do we move beyond our habits of either/or thinking, to a genuine embrace of both congregational life and ministry in settings beyond the parish?

Congregational Involvement: What is the importance of congregational involvement for community ministers? The authorization of ministers is not just a personal sense of call, but involves community discernment and affirmation. How do you have the benefits of communal discernment and covenantal relationship if you are a minister, but not grounded in active participation in a congregation? What practices would affirm the significance of community discernment and covenantal relationship for community ministers?

Ordination Practices: Are existing traditional understandings of ordination adequate for community ministry or do we need new understandings? Where and how do we educate ourselves about the meaning of ordination, ministry and the mission of the church? What is our sense of meaning around the ordained ministry? How important or limiting is the notion that the power to ordain belongs exclusively to congregations? Is there merit in other bodies such as the Society for the Larger Ministry performing ordinations?

People and Positions: To what extent is community ministry dependent on the job market? We seem to be prepared to recognize a community ministry by place and type of work -- it is ministry if it is an act of witness, compassion, or advocacy in a place of human distress, suffering, or oppression, or religious significance. Are we prepared to ordain people to the community ministry in the belief that they will witness wherever they are employed? Are we saying "this is ordained ministry because you are doing it, and our congregation calls you to be our witness in whatever field of employment you find yourself"?

The Priesthood of All Believers: Since our religious tradition affirms that all people are gifted and called for a life of wholeness and usefulness, how do we celebrate this fundamental affirmation of our faith? We embody it in the practice of congregational election of leaders -- but how do we celebrate it? We've abandoned the ritual of baptism that once functioned as a sign that each person is gifted and called. Why do we continue the practice of ordination when we've abandoned baptism?

Shared Ministry: How does community ministry relate to the increased interest in our movement in the ministry of the laity? Are ordination and professional preparation necessary and meaningful, or do we need to find ways to more clearly call one another to lives of religious depth and service, and to shared work without so much fuss? Can we enlarge our sense of ministry to be "the whole work of the church"? At what point does preoccupation with status and category, affirmation, validity, and celebration become a distraction from doing the work we are all called to do?

We raise these questions and offer them along with our research, reflection and conclusions, confident that something worthwhile is stirring within our religious movement.

Let it rise on wings.

The Starr King School Project on Community Ministry
February, 1995

Barbara Child, Jeanne Clemons, Gail Collins-Ranadive,
Tawna Nicholas Cooley, Alicia Forsey, Mary Harrington,
and Rebecca Parker, with Kyle Nash with us for the
final conversation.

COMMUNITY MINISTRY
TRANSFORMATIVE CALL TO A LARGER CHURCH

I. The Living Tradition

Unitarian Universalism is a Living Tradition; it exists in the present context with a rich inheritance from the past and a deep desire to contribute to the fullness of life for all in the future. Community ministry is part and parcel of this Living Tradition; it has roots in our past tradition, exists uneasily in our present context, and seeks to transform our lives and our world for the better in the present and the future. Understanding the past and present of community ministry, both in our UU tradition and in the larger world, is vital to making decisions about community ministry in our congregations and individually.

A Living Tradition is not stagnant. It is creative, vibrant and growing. It breathes life into our congregations and draws life from our ever-changing world. Growth brings change, and often change brings confusion or turmoil. So it has been with community ministry in recent years. Theological reflection may decrease the confusion and reduce some of the turmoil which has come along with the growth of community ministry in our denomination.

Each new generation must review and reappropriate images and forms of ministry, finding its own contemporary images and forms that project motivation and meaning for their times. Fundamental to appropriating anew the nature and task of ministry is to reaffirm central theological convictions.¹ Ministry and the church cannot be explained in other than theological terms. While social, political and economic factors are important, it is the theological dimension that makes ministry and church different from other philanthropic organizations. Secular issues constitute contextual factors which have an intrinsic bearing on how the more specifically religious mission of the church is carried out.²

An understanding of community ministry is not possible without an exploration of the role of the church, the meaning of ordination, denominational polity, and institutional practices. Much of the past discussions about community ministry have focused on institutional practices such as credentialing, compensation and support, accountability, and relationships between congregations, parish ministers and community ministers. These are important issues which need to be addressed. We also suggest that the present confusion surrounding institutional practices and community ministry is not about community ministry itself but more a fundamental confusion over ministry and the role of the church as a whole. Theological and historical reflection may deepen understanding and provide grounding for future institutional practice in our UU Living Tradition.

¹ Donald E. Messer, *Images of Christian Ministry*, pp. 14-15.

² William R. Burrows, *New Ministries: The Global Context*, p.3.

II. Community Ministers as Sensors

The movement towards community-based ministries in our denomination has been spontaneous and broad-based. It represents new growth in our tradition that is actively responding to a changing world and to evolving understandings of the role of the church and the meaning of ministry. David Bos, in his book *A Practical Guide to Community Ministry*, states:

"One of the more interesting and unexplored aspects of community ministry is its capacity to be a sensor of social needs before they are generally known or recognized... This 'sensing' function does not take its cue from national or regional priority-setting processes. Its priorities emerge in the day-to-day interplay of people and events in their neighborhoods."³

Bos is naming a sensor function of community ministry in regards to social justice needs (an example he gave was early recognition of child sexual abuse by three community ministry programs prior to national attention being focused on the problem). Given our UU commitment to social action, this is an important aspect of UU community ministries as well. Going one step further, it is likely that the increasing numbers of community ministers in our denomination are acting as sensors of an emerging change in the priorities of our membership. Community ministers are challenging the denomination with a more expanded view of the role of the church than has been prevalent in the past. By their very presence in a wide range of areas, they are bringing about a reevaluation of the meaning and function of ministry, both lay and professional, in the UU context.

The surge in community ministers may be sensors of a growing desire for or a concept of a "universal church" or a "larger church" in the Unitarian Universalist movement. In our polity, the congregation is our source of power, with the UUA existing to serve the needs of the congregations. Congregational authority is the only authority. From this polity over time has emerged a sense of the individual church, the building on the corner so to speak, as the be-all and end-all of Unitarian Universalism. To be a Unitarian Universalist has come to mean being a member of the local congregation and centering religious activities there. Thus, the parish has become the center of all ministry; and taking care of the congregation in the parish the first priority, or perhaps the only priority, of Unitarian Universalist ministry. The larger community becomes part of the ministerial context, but is not a ministerial responsibility. Currently, freelance community ministers are not possible in the UU denomination because there has been no place for a concept of a universal church, a church larger than the local parish church on the corner (with the possible exception of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, which considers itself to be an autonomous congregation also).

³ A. David Bos, *A Practical Guide to Community Ministry*, p. 20.

III. Call of Community Ministers

Community ministers envision and feel called to minister to needs beyond the doors of the local parish. They feel called to live a life that speaks to the deeds that beckon in the world.⁴ They feel called to live their lives and do those deeds in the larger world inspired and sustained by their Unitarian Universalist faith, to embody the Unitarian Universalist principles and purposes in a world full of injustice, brokenness and need for healing. They feel called to do this in ways that have theological dimensions, in manners and in places where their liberal religious background provides a basis for practical actions in the world. They desire to be recognized and affirmed as representatives of their UU liberal religious tradition, and to be in fellowship with other UU ministers who are living and working with their UU faith as a focal point, whether they are parish ministers or ministers of religious education.

While these community ministers may not be working in a local parish, they consider themselves to be doing the work of the Unitarian Universalist church. They may be doing ministries which carry out the work of resolutions passed by congregational representatives at General Assemblies. They may be ministerial representatives of the liberal religious tradition as prison or hospital chaplains, or as campus ministers, positions which require ordination but which are not parish ministries. They may be pastoral counselors or spiritual directors for those who feel such needs but want a trained person with a liberal religious background. They may be working in a multitude of ways with social justice causes where their theological background enlarges and enhances their work and their relationships with those whom they serve. They may work in interfaith organizations. They may create ministries unique to their particular gifts or new ministries yet unenvisioned. Whatever the differences in various community ministries, they are tied together by commitment to Unitarian Universalist values as they do their work in the world outside the parish.

IV. Challenge to Congregational Polity

Congregational polity, which places the parish at the center of ministerial activities, does not easily provide a place for Unitarian Universalists who feel called to minister as Unitarian Universalists in the larger world. For this reason, community ministers have presented a challenge to institutional structures of the denomination. This challenge can be perceived in more than one way. It can be seen as a threat to the basic nature of the UU tradition, a threat to be resisted by forcing community ministers into the parish/congregational box somehow, or even by denigrating community ministry. It can also be seen as an opportunity to reflect on changes which have brought about the rise in community

⁴ From *Rank by Rank We Stand*, Hymn No. 358 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

ministry and to creatively respond to the challenges presented in such a way that new life and new growth flows into the denomination. If community ministers are considered to be sensors of an evolving concept of a larger Unitarian Universalist church, what does that mean for us as a denomination? Is a commitment to Unitarian Universalism as a force beyond the congregation necessarily a challenge to congregational polity? Can we find practical ways within our existing congregational polity to affirm those UU's who feel deeply committed to ministering in the community as Unitarian Universalists? Can we be open to the possibilities of transformation arising from the liminality of community ministers?

V. Liminal Position of Community Ministers

Issues of liminality were explored by Douglas Davies in a study of Ministers in Secular Employment in the Church of England, and his observations provide valuable insight for the theological reflection of community ministers in our denomination. "Liminality" is an anthropological term used to describe periods of life when people stand betwixt and between fixed positions and statuses. The word derives from the Latin, *limen*, meaning a threshold, and was initially applied to the state and process of being mid-transition in a rite of passage. During the liminal period, those in a liminal position are ambiguous as they pass through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state, and they are between all familiar lines of classification. Those in a liminal position are frequently stripped of status and authority.⁵ Liminality is now seen to apply to all phases of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behavior are subject to revision and criticism.⁶ Those in liminal positions represent a transformative dimension of the social; liminality represents not only transition, or "going to be," but also potentiality, or "what may be." While those in a liminal position are removed from the traditional social structure, their powerlessness may be compensated for by a sacred power or a liberating power. The removal of structures can increase reception of sacred knowledge, and the freedom of thought inherent in liminality can lead to major reformulation of the social structure and the root paradigms which guide social actions.⁷

Liminal positions are highly significant times in people's lives, full of personal transformation. People who experience liminal positions together are said to experience "communitas", or unity in joy or sorrow among those confronting basic life events and transitions together. Davies makes these important observations associated with community ministers and liminality:

⁵ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 249.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

"Although parish priests encounter people undergoing various rites of passage and who are subject to the in-between state of liminality, the priests are themselves firmly based in a fixed status. They are the ones who manage the liminality of others. The Minister in Secular Employment, by contrast, is more likely to be part and parcel of the experience of *communitas* shared by people when in some joy or sorrow. *Communitas* has been described as the more common stuff of human experience out of which formal hierarchies may emerge and back into which status differences are occasionally submerged. If we apply this idea of *communitas* to the Minister in Secular Employment, then it accords rather well with the idea of his being a representative person...I would like to marry the anthropological idea of *communitas* with the theological notion of *koinonia* or fellowship. Both ideas concern the quality of relationship between people. Fellowship and oneness...becomes so internalized in Ministers in Secular Employment that they are able to take it into the wider community and to recognize *communitas* when it occurs. They are able to forge from the inarticulateness of people in moments of crisis or joy some expression of that empowering *koinonia*."⁸

Davies also notes that discomfort with the role of Ministers in Secular Employment arises from another experience of liminality. Davies observes:

"...how the process of training for the ministry may be seen as a rite of passage, where the ordinand is separated from his church (through the process of selection), then enters a state of liminality (through the process of training), and finally is reincorporated into the community, but in a new status (through ordination). But in the case of the Minister in Secular Employment... the third stage of the rite is not entirely clear, in so far as the ordained minister retains a 'lay' occupation."⁹

Davies goes on to ask the question:

"...whether Ministers in Secular Employment constitute an institutional liminality, vis-a-vis both the religious realm of the church and the secular realm of employment. The ordinand may be permanently marginalized to both, which can be a most creative position **if the strain can be maintained.**"¹⁰ (Vaughn's emphasis)

This position of "institutional liminality" may explain some of the discomfort and difficulties of community ministers and others associated with them in our denomination. The community

⁸ Douglas Davies in Fuller and Vaughn, pp. 99-100.

⁹ Douglas Davies in Patrick Vaughn, *Non-Stipendary Ministry in the Church of England*, p. 319.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

ministers themselves are constantly in tension due to their position betwixt and between their two poles of work and church. They are pulled to meet needs in both directions, yet are not fully integrated, and possibly are not fully accepted, in either place. The constant tension of their in-between position creates a need for support, but support is difficult to find because they are marginalized to both sides. In addition, a classic reaction to a marginalized person or marginalized groups from persons or groups in more stable positions is a sense of discomfort and unease. Those marginalized can have varying stages of anger with those in stable groups due to their lack of integration into the group. Those already in the group can feel threatened by the marginalized persons and may resist their presence.

As Davies notes, however, the position of institutional liminality can be a most creative position. Since they occupy a strategic place on the boundary where the world and the church overlap, community ministers have a distinctive role to play in shaping the church's theological thought and social actions. The difficulty of this creative position, as Davies so aptly stresses, is whether or not the community minister can maintain the strain involved. Unitarian Universalist congregations entering into a relationship with a community minister may wish to give intentional thought how to provide the community minister with some forms of support. The denomination, having already made the decision to include a professional community ministry track, may now need to consider the implications of the liminal position held by community ministers and determine how to respond to issues of marginality, creative possibilities and need for support to reduce the strain. Individuals considering community ministry should be aware of how this institutional position may affect them personally and impact their ability over time to perform the ministry they are contemplating.

VI. Ecumenical Dimensions

Community ministry is fertile ground for anyone skilled in thinking ecumenically and globally, and for whom "local" is an expandable context leading to overarching concerns.¹¹ Community ministries can model on a congregational scale the complementary relationship between ecumenism and social action.¹² Social action has been an important part of community ministry since the early Christian groups invited Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, to worship together. Social action here refers to actions by a religious group to change the structures of society, and will always be a part of community ministry as long as societies do not approach perfection.¹³

¹¹ A. David Bos, *A Practical Guide to Community Ministry*, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

The parish and ministry linkage is experienced in the community ministries movement above all by the connection between pastoral care and social ministry. We come to understand, for example, that the pastoral needs of an individual have a social dimension and that their resolution may require social action. Joe Holland, social critic and contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter*, coined the term "pastoral action," by which he means action towards social justice based upon pastoral care motivations and concerns: "The hunger for community is perhaps one of the most important pastoral indicators in a society marked by rootlessness, fragmentation and spiritual sterility."¹⁴ As pastoral action, community ministry restores the capability of churches to care for the community as a whole. Ongoing programs of community ministry constitute a framework for uncovering systematic problems and advocating solutions.¹⁵

In order to change systems, one generally has to work at a level of larger scope than the neighborhood (one may need to move statewide or nationwide). It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate global from local concerns due to the rapid dissemination of information, interdependence of economies, and deterioration of our shared environment. A community ministry may need to ally itself with other ministries experiencing the same convictions and frustrations (i.e. a wider coalition).¹⁶ In addition, community ministry does not depend exclusively on one discipline; a potpourri of educational backgrounds is essential for response. There is an ecumenicity of disciplines because community ministry engages all who occupy themselves with the concept of community.¹⁷

An important characteristic of community ministries is the notion that they have a certain capacity or freedom to accomplish things that governmental and other private agencies do not possess.¹⁸ The ministry may begin with the question: How does a congregation minister in and with its own community? This question can be expanded to: How does a congregation participate in wider circles of ecumenical/interfaith and social ministry through its work in and with the local community?¹⁹ In this process a community ministry becomes a constituent part of the congregation. It engages the congregation with the concept of community.

This engagement of the congregation can encourage a broadened understanding of the ministry of the laity. Inherent in the community ministry movement is a recognition of many kinds of ministry, including lay ministry. Community ministry is one way to develop among the laity awareness of their ability to work for

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

social justice and human development, and conversely it can be an outgrowth of existing lay commitment to religious action. Thus, community ministry not only straddles the boundary between the world and the church, but also between lay and ordained ministry.

Unitarian Universalism does not exist in a vacuum, separate from what is happening in other denominations. Christian churches have been experiencing a renewed awareness of the ministry of all believers in recent years. Likewise, other churches have witnessed a spontaneous growth of community ministries at the same time as our denomination. Bos states:

"In the late 1960's faith communities in the United States engaged in wide-ranging experimentation that was meant to impact the social fabric. Experiments were found from local to worldwide levels and ranged from innovation in worship to recreation. New ecumenical and interfaith ministries began to spring up, some of which were referred to as 'experimental ministries'.

"For the most part, the new ministries were not connected to each other and did not view themselves as part of a larger movement. But in retrospect there were several spontaneous and simultaneous explosions of ecumenical/interfaith energy... Each project was unique, but each was also more a part of a larger development than their founders knew."²⁰

The Unitarian Universalist community ministry movement occurred during this same time frame, and is likely a part of this larger development. Yet, we have remained isolated from association with the larger movement. Bos notes that:

"...though individual community ministries are as unique as their immediate environment... We are co-participants in a significant movement, experiencing the same tensions and problems, the same sense of absolute uniqueness based on our locales, and the same exhilaration that comes from a ministry that is truly local, social, and ecumenical/interfaith."²¹

In recent years the ecumenical and community ministry movements have influenced each other. Two branches of the ecumenical movement, the Ecumenical Networks Working Group (formerly the Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism) of the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Ecumenical Staff, have made efforts to include community ministry in their structures.²² Unitarian Universalists could benefit from and contribute to these ecumenical efforts if we choose to deepen our understanding of community ministry.

²⁰ Ibid., p. xi.

²¹ Ibid., p. xii.

²² Ibid., p. 41.

VII. Learning from the Experience of the Church of England

The growth and attendant stresses of community-type ministries are not unique to Unitarian Universalists, or even to the United States. Mircea Eliade, pioneer in the systematic study of world religions, noted that sometimes we have to go to a stranger in order to learn about ourselves. There is much instructive for Unitarian Universalists to learn from the experience of the Church of England with specialized ministries. In 1930, the Anglican Conference gave guarded permission for the development of Non-Stipendary Ministry (NSM); the subject returned to the Conference three more times with increasing support until the 1968 Conference:

"...wished to recommend 'a wider and more confident use of this ministry' while the committee report discussing the need for 'a greater diversity in the exercise of the ordained ministry' went out of its way to assert 'The part-time non-stipendary priest is in no way inferior to his full-time stipendary brother.'²³

In 1970, specialized ministries were formally recognized; terminology used by the Church of England was Non-Stipendary Ministry and by the United Reform Church was Auxiliary Ministry. These were defined by the Working Party of the Ministry Committee:

"...as a non-parochial clergyman who is employed and paid primarily for exercising his ministry, and we have excluded those who are paid primarily for doing a secular job, but who also exercise a ministry through that job... We have been very conscious throughout our work that in non-parochial ministry the lines are necessarily blurred, and it is quite impossible to categorize neatly all the forms of ministry a man can exercise."²⁴

The Committee Report emphasized that it was:

*"written with the underlying assumption that these developments in full-time specialized ministry are to be encouraged. Such ministries are not a luxury for the Church, but a necessity. We hope that what we say will press the Church into taking its responsibilities to specialised clergy more seriously, and will also help clergy and lay people alike to appreciate more fully the important work being done by them."*²⁵

The Report underlined that in the modern world different forms of ministry are required for different tasks. The Report cautioned against using any analogy from the medical model along the divisions between specialists and general practitioners

²³ Fuller and Vaughn, *Working for the Kingdom*, p.184.

²⁴ The Report of a Working Party of the Ministry Committee, *Specialised Ministries*, p.11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

because both parochial and specialised clergy together are seeking to administer to the whole man.²⁶ However, they recognized emerging tensions between parochial ministers and specialised ministers. The Report took the position that:

"Specialised clergy and parochial clergy complement each other.. In the mission of the Church all these gifts and skills must be integrated and used in partnership... Both are equal partners in a plural ministry of both laity and clergy, although each has a distinctive part to play in the partnership."²⁷

The Working Report laid out a few principles, and the Bishop's Regulations of 1970 offered loose guidelines for practical application of specialised ministries. Over time, a picture began to emerge of what this style of ministry was becoming in practice; the outline seemed to be distorted by unhappy stories of failure to be accepted as colleagues by the parochial clergy, of unreasonable expectations of workload, and of covert remarks about 'second-class priesthood.'²⁸ A trend became apparent where specialised ministers were drifting into parochial ministry or leaving the ministry altogether. A study of specialised ministers ensued, resulting in a diverse book edited by John Fuller and Patrick Vaughn, *Working for the Kingdom*. In the preface, they chose to use the term, Ministers in Secular Employment (MSE), which had come into use by the practitioners themselves. The MSE's are a subgroup, and the term was to identify it separately from other forms of specialised ministry such as retirement ministry and 'Local Non-Stipendary Ministry' (LNSM). The latter, also known as Local Ordained Ministry, was brought into existence in 1980 as a result of structural confusion between professionally trained non-stipendary ministers and local lay leadership.

Those familiar with community ministry in our Unitarian Universalist denomination will recognize many similarities in the above discussion, as well as many hot points. The Church of England is two decades ahead of us in their experience. They have had the time to move through some of the institutional struggles, such as trying to identify and respect the different roles of lay and professional non-stipendary ministry. Unitarian Universalist community ministry is not precisely the same as specialised ministry in the Church of England, and the choices we make will not be the same. Yet, we need to address many of the same issues they have already addressed, and we can benefit from the ministerial surveys and theological reflections they have done.

The opening statement of Part I of *Working for the Kingdom* is illuminating:

²⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁸ Fuller and Vaughn, *Working for the Kingdom*, pp. 117-118.

"In all the debate about NSM surprisingly little attempt has been made to discover exactly what ministry in the world of work might be. Discussion of the subject has usually been dominated by concepts derived from the *parochial* ministry, which has made it difficult for MSE's to enunciate their particular insights about ministry. They are constantly hounded by questions such as 'Why do you need to be ordained to bear Christian witness at work? Doesn't your baptism authorize that?' or 'What more are you doing at work now that you are ordained?'. It is virtually impossible to answer these questions in terms of the questioner's assumptions. Such questions are inappropriate, because they tacitly assume that the parochial model of ministry should control the terms of the discussion, and thus require MSE's to justify themselves in terms of the parochial minister's language."

Many factors were identified in the study of MSE's; only a few can be summarized here. MSE's see the broader world as the field for fellowship and ministry. Five themes emerge in the MSE: Person, Power, Priesthoods, Sacralization and Liminal Experience. MSE's are roughly equivalent to UU community ministers, so these themes may approximate those ministers in our denomination also.

Person: MSE's have a distinctive sense of identity; a non-elitist view of religious life; an accepting attitude towards a diversity of people; talk more about 'being' rather than 'doing' when referring to their own sense of ministry; the language used by MSE's is that used by charismatics in terms of caring and sharing under the influence of the Spirit with empathy and understanding of other people; and a deeply grounded personal sense of the worth of each individual.

Power: Power has associated with it a positive moral charge, for the MSE's possess formal authority of the Church behind their personal gift of relationship; personal power is not understood in the hierarchical sense; MSE's view those whom they serve as equals.

Priesthoods: MSE's tend to possess that life-enhancing power which is intrinsic to 'natural priesthood' (e.g. wise people, shamans, etc.); there are two subgroups of MSE's, one seeking to baptize the world into the Church and the other wanting to immerse the Church in the world.

Sacralization: MSE's make no sharp distinctions between the sacred and the profane, but seek to make the world holy; MSE's become symbols of integration; MSE's tend to be a force countering fragmentation in life, but this raises question of dual commitment and tension for MSE's ordained in a Church where the parochial model is dominant; MSE's bring up distinction between vocation and profession, an important theme for any training in ministry; MSE's are often called to interpret the Church to the world, but they are infrequently asked to interpret the world to the Church.

Liminal Experience: An expanded discussion of this can be found in Section V, Liminal Position of Community Ministers.

The *Working for the Kingdom* study ended with "two major questions, which each lead into a series of subsidiary ones: *Whom do MSE's represent? What is their distinctive contribution to the Church's mission?*"²⁹

Representative of Personal Charisma? MSE's see ordination as an individual gift of authorization; this sense of personal vocation is also present for parochial ministers but because their subsequent ministerial role is better known, few are pressed to define the distinctive contribution of ordination. By contrast, MSE's are asked and so have to seek an answer pertinent to themselves; thus an individualistic view of ministry is encouraged at the outset. If this persists beyond the pioneer stage, how can MSE's be representatives? There is a need to seek some form of accountability which leaves room for individualism but avoids its excesses. The need is for an imaginative framework of accountability, or the initiative of MSE's will be stifled.

Representative of the Clergy? If this were truly to be the case, tensions between parochial clergy and MSE's would need to decrease so that they saw themselves as the members of the same ministerial cadre. Besides those tensions already identified, because of the practice of licensing MSE's to a local home church MSE's have a parochial ministry in addition to the ministry at work. They are expected to teach, run meetings, maintain pastoral contacts and/or do worship services on occasion. Although valued, this ministry in the home church places dual demands and pressures on their time and energy. These activities are rarely reimbursed. While other church members volunteer in addition to a full-time job, it often provides a balance to their life. For an MSE it creates an imbalance, leaving little time or energy for non-ministerial activities.

Representative of the Laity? MSE's speak of themselves as being seen by lay people as their representatives. The research suggests the presence of MSE's seems to liberate lay people. The study suggests that parochial clergy need to heed the distinctive role of the MSE in the parish, namely that of mobilizing the local congregation for its ministry in the world.

Representative of the Church? One has to ask how the whole Church is to be represented. There is a clear tendency to stress the local church. If MSE's are to have a wider ministry, then they need to perceive themselves and be perceived by others as representative of the universal church.

Representative of the Workplace? As MSE's work outside of the parish, their roles at work affect their ministry. The possibility of role clash is obvious. While at work, the MSE's

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

primary loyalty is to the employer; they are being paid to do certain tasks. One respondent in the study said, "My work is my parish." MSE's can represent the world to the church, and are in the position to speak from the inside to other clergy, but with insight gained outside the church. There is a structural bias against MSE's in that their license is maintained at their home church and the wording of the license usually ignores the ministry at work.

Representative of God? MSE's testify to the centrality of God-talk in their ministries in the sense of 'presence' and in the 'being' of ministry; this intangible expression is present whether or not there is church-talk. MSE's are daily confronted with God's activity in the world, and are concerned to cooperate with all, whether believers or not.

Patrick Vaughn compiled a summary of the factors influencing Non-Stipendary Ministry in the Church of England during the period from 1970 to 1987. One could almost substitute the name of our denomination and the term community ministry in the following table and it would seem applicable.

SUMMARY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENT 1970-1987 30

Inhibiting Power of the Parochial Model

The single most influential factor seems to have been the needs of the parochial system. Where NSM has been seen to support the parochial system, it has flourished. But this has resulted in a sense of frustration amongst those with a personal vision of non-parochial patterns of ministry, and a tendency for such individuals to transfer from NSM to stipendary ministry. Similar structural biases against NSM have shown themselves at many different levels of the diocesan and national Church.

Professional Pressures

The interests of the clerical profession have constantly constrained radical development of NSM. Where the parochial clergy seems to have been threatened, such clergy have made life difficult for non-stipendary ministers. But the maintenance of selection procedures and training standards for NSM at a level comparable to that for Stipendary ministers has meant that latterly professional pressures have been a constraint, not so much upon NSM, as upon Local Non-Stipendary Ministers (where measures of comparability have been abandoned).

Lack of Clarity about MSE

The failure of the Church to produce an agreed rationale or strategic use for MSE has inhibited the growth of this aspect of NSM. But the publication of *Ministers of the*

³⁰ Patrick Vaughn, *Non-Stipendary Ministry in the Church of England*, p. 300-301.

Kingdom (1985) and the revised *Regulations* (1987) may, at a late date, have filled this vacuum.

Publications

In the early period, the lack of officially sponsored material about NSM in general led to widespread misunderstandings about its nature and purpose. The more recent spate of publications and official reports have helped forward churchpeople's knowledge, with corresponding growth of appreciation of NSM.

Action / Reflection Model

It seems that the Church, perhaps unconsciously, has operated with an action / reflection model of doing its theology. Thus, it may not have been possible to write or publicize much about NSM in the early stages. It appears that it may have been necessary for actual experience of this new pattern of ministry to accumulate over a decade or so before theological reflection upon it became possible.

Creation of LNSM

The existence of LNSM on the scene from 1980 is a completely new factor. It is too early to analyse its effect upon the development of NSM.

Vaughn's comprehensive history shows a lack of consensus in acceptance of the non-parochial forms of ministry until there was a shift in theological understanding of ordained ministry. With this came a recognition of the laity's vocation in the world. Both of these happened as a concern for the mission of the church in the world became more central. Development of NSM has been constrained by the parochial system and the vested interests of parochial ministers, as well as by disregard of theological principles.

There are parallels to the Unitarian Universalist community ministry movement, and we can benefit from their experience by giving intentional thought to all of these lessons. We can respond to the call of the community ministry movement for a broadened understanding of the meaning of our church and for a deepened theological commitment to ministry, both lay and ordained. We can affirm the ecumenical dimensions of community ministry, embodying our Principles and Purposes in a world full of injustice, brokenness and need for healing. Surely we can find creative ways to meet the institutional challenges and to work with each other's form of commitment to Unitarian Universalism. Let us embrace strong, vibrant growth in our liberal religious tradition through community ministry, by recognizing its transformative call to wholeness.

Tawna Nicholas Cooley
February 24, 1995

A HAND IS LAID UPON US:
THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE OF COMMUNITY MINISTRY

"How shall we not feel . . . 'the heart-break in the heart of things'? A hand is laid upon us."

-- James Luther Adams¹

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to articulate the theological affirmations implicit in community ministry.²

While we say we are a religious tradition without theological *doctrine*, and without *creeds*, we are not theologically neutral. For example, when we take the position that we refuse to establish doctrinal tests or creeds we actively leave room for the workings of the spirit, for individual conscience and experience, for dialogue with one another, for fresh expressions of the religious. This is not a neutral position, but an impassioned one. We hold to a core conviction that the realm of the religious always exceeds our efforts to contain it.

Our practices in the realm of polity embody theological conviction. For example, our congregations elect their own leadership, including their ministerial leadership. This says we believe that individuals have within themselves the resources of insight, inspiration, and wisdom to govern themselves. This is a theological conviction, rooted historically in a belief that the spirit of God is present within every life.

In 1991 the General Assembly voted to fellowship community ministers. For the first time, we chose to formally recognize

¹James Luther Adams, "Radical Laicism," in *The Prophethood of All Believers*, edited by Kim Beach (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 95 (hereafter "Adams").

²I wish to thank my colleagues in the Starr King Community Ministry Project and Patti Lawrence, for the rich conversation and shared research that led me to see community ministry in new ways. Rick Koyle has been an invaluable companion in the work of thinking through and writing this piece, for which I am grateful.

the existence and significance of ordained ministries in settings other than the parish. This marked a change in our collective practices. What does the change say, theologically?

Theological Affirmations

"One day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed."³

-- Alice Walker

"Our orientation, our point of identity, is to powers that are creative and sustaining and transforming, not ultimately of our making but rather gifts. In a sense, these powers depend on us to respond. Our vocation is to point to these powers and to respond to them for the sake of freedom and mutuality."⁴

-- James Luther Adams

These words of Alice Walker and James Luther Adams capture the central affirmations implicit in community ministry.

"If I cut a tree, my arm will bleed."

Community ministry springs from the recognition that we are intimately connected to one another and all of life. It matters significantly how we are with one another. We are capable of injuring one another by how we relate, or we are capable of affirming and assisting one another. Connectedness is a given of our existence. The only question is, "What will we do with our connections? What quality of relationship do we desire?" Love seeks responsibility and care.

The nineteenth century forerunners of our contemporary movement for community ministry spoke of our dependence on one another when they articulated the claim laid upon us to deal responsibly and lovingly with one another in life. Joseph Tuckerman, founder of the Benevolent Fraternity in Boston, a cooperative effort to minister to the needs of the poor in Boston's urban slums, wrote:

³Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982), p. 127.

⁴Adams, p. 93.

"In every stage of his being here, from the first breath of infancy to the last of the extremist old age, every one is scarcely less dependent upon his fellow beings, than he is upon the vital air and upon food."⁵

Tuckerman conceived of our responsibility to care for one another in concrete terms:

"Every individual who has the means . . . should feel his obligation to seek out and to know a few families with which he shall connect himself as a Christian friend . . . in times of sickness and sorrow to be their comforter; and in seasons of whatsoever to minister to their necessities"⁶

Nineteenth century Universalists were also keen about a vision of human connectedness. Beginning with a theological affirmation of God's universal love, Universalism called its adherents to all-embracing love for human beings. Thomas Whittemore, a Universalist writing at the middle of the nineteenth century, speaks with fervor of this imperative:

"See, then, that there is a common bond, -- a tie, -- uniting the vast family of man. No circumstance of birth, or of color, -- no misfortune, no oppression; neither poverty, nor vice, nor disgrace, nor death, can sunder it. . . . Who believing and realizing this, can be unkind? Who can be entirely engrossed in his own welfare? Who can be the oppressor of his brethren? Who can be deaf to the moan of the sufferer? to the plaintive entreaty of the poor?"⁷

In the twentieth century we have witnessed tragic denials of our dependence on one another and on the planet, and we are experiencing the consequences. In the holocaust of World War II we experienced the Christian saying to the Jew, "I have no need of you." In the slashing and burning of rain forests, we experience human beings saying to the earth, "I have no need of you." In contemporary American society's hostility towards the poor, we hear our voices say, "I have no need of you. You have

⁵Joseph Tuckerman, "Two Selections on the Christian's Social Responsibility," in *An American Reformation*, edited by Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. 342.

⁶Tuckerman, p. 349.

⁷Thomas Whittemore, *The Plain Guide to Universalism* (Boston: Published by the author, 1840), p. 240.

no claim on me." The consequences of this denial of our dependence include violence; a loss of a quality of life marked by civility and respect; increased insularity, suffering, and a diminishment of our souls; and a planet at risk of environmental collapse.

At the same time, a deepened and renewed conception is emerging of the reality that we are bound together in one bundle of life. Process theology expounds on the relational, organic character of life, and denies that anything exists apart from relational interdependence with the whole of life. Systems theory, post-modern physics, the biology of eco-systems all reinforce a relational vision. Feminist theology critically deconstructs the image of separate selfhood, and emphasizes that we are "made from this earth."⁸

We recognize that commitment to right relationship is critically important for the survival of life. We know this is a religious issue and we recognize that our circle of concern must extend to the interdependence of all life. We cannot focus religion in the realm of the personal and the private alone, or be concerned only with the sustaining of religious communities in which people minister to one another. We must give our attention to the public sphere, the whole of life. Our religious calling is grounded in life itself -- life that calls out to be cherished and sustained in patterns of justice and love.

In these times "liberal faith has a peculiar responsibility, given its openness and belief in the interdependence of people," writes Clare Fischer. "The church is a splendid site for the encouragement of religious citizenship -- that is to say, an activism attached to a deep sense of religious faith. . . . [T]he church is an institution that should not contribute to insularity and the 'life style enclave' spirit that fragments effort to construct the common good."⁹ Rather, we are admonished to follow the lead of people like Aurelia Henry Reinhardt, whose life work as an active Unitarian laywoman in education and social reform was grounded in a deep sense of the interdependence of life.

"I have a liking for the word 'world'," Reinhardt wrote.
"It takes for granted national and racial difference,
implying that despite these, we are children living

⁸Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 235.

⁹Clare Fischer, "Woman's Voice in Public Space," in *Regaining Historical Consciousness*, edited by Warren Ross (Berkeley: Starr King School, 1994), p. 81.

on one shining star in the universe."¹⁰

Community ministry gives concrete expression to liberal religion's affirmation that the sphere of our concern is the world, as blessedly and inescapably interdependent and relational.

There is a second, core affirmation embodied in community ministry. It is the sense that we live and move and have our being in the presence of "powers that are creative and sustaining and transforming, not ultimately of our making but rather gifts."¹¹ This is the theological affirmation of liberal theism: the conviction that there is power present in life that creates, sustains, and transforms. Some call this power God, some speak of grace, or Spirit, or the deepest wisdom within us, some speak of "the ground of all relating", or of Love.

In affirming community ministry we are not theologically neutral on the question of God. While we refuse to be dogmatic, doctrinal, or closed in our language, community ministry cannot fully be understood apart from the affirmation that there is something in life that "lays a claim upon us" and empowers us to fulfill that claim.

This claim has been expressed in the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew scriptures:

*"The spirit of God is upon me,
because God has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up hearts that are broken,
to proclaim liberty to captives
freedom to those in prison,
to comfort all those who mourn"*
(Isaiah 61)

It is echoed by the Society for the Larger Ministry, in its 1988 covenant to

*"respond to the cries of pain, to our own brokenness,
and to awaken the healing spirit of hope; to . . . act upon
the basic causes of human hurt and separation."*

James Luther Adams speaks of the hand laid upon us as those creative, sustaining, and transforming powers present in all of life, within us and beyond us. This "love that will not let us go" urges us to claim abundant life for ourselves and for our

¹⁰Quoted by Fischer, p. 81.

¹¹Adams, p. 93.

neighbor, and leads us to a life of active attention to the places where love is most needed.

Affirmation of an ever present spirit that calls, comforts, heals, inspires, and sustains is the basis for the priesthood and prophethood of all believers, and the foundation for the mission of the church.

If we affirm that holy power touches all of us, *is present in all of us*, then we promote an understanding that every human being has a religious vocation to live centered in that power, responsive to that power, and as a witness to that power. The gift of this power is freedom, and healing. And its imperative is love.

Neil Shadle names our religious vocation this way:

"Ministry is the work of the spirit. In all the activities of our vocation, we seek to be present at those points at which the sacred discloses itself among us, those points at which the brokenness of life is most pressing, those points at which creative and restorative power is operating in behalf of whole being. Our task at those points is to become part of the action, to encourage it, to draw the attention of others to it and to engage them in it with us, to interpret its meaning in the perspective of liberal faith, and to cultivate ever-fresh means of celebrating the image and activity of the spirit among persons and in the events of history."¹²

Adams' statement echoes and underscores this point:

"In a sense, these powers depend on us to respond. Our vocation is to point to these powers and to respond to them for the sake of freedom and mutuality."¹³

The Mission of the Church

Building on the affirmation that life is interdependent, and that life is permeated by powers that create, sustain, and transform, an understanding of the mission of the church emerges.

Ron Engle describes the vision shared by friends who became

¹²Neil Shadle, "Some Propositions for Consideration in Response to the Question: What is Ministry," unpublished paper, Society for the Larger Ministry Conference, Autumn, 1990.

¹³Adams, p. 93.

active in cutting-edge community ministry in the sixties:

"We were concerned to reject what we perceived as the prevailing model of religious understanding -- a model which assumed God acts through the church to save the world. Or, if one is humanistically inclined, the assumption that the church lives out its spiritual ideals by putting them 'to work' in the world outside. In either case, we rejected any notion that the church is the sacred center -- the holy place -- out of which people go to save the world or 'do' social action.

We were concerned to affirm a radical this-worldly model of religious understanding that began with the world, saw the divine at work within the world, creating, sustaining and redeeming it, and called the church to witness to that saving reality . . .

The world is filled with sacred centers, and it is the mission of the church to identify, celebrate, and serve the creativity of those places."¹⁴

The image of the church as the center from which we move out to do social action or service is familiar to us. But the community ministry movement pushes us beyond this conventional understanding of church into a more radical position. It asks us to begin with the affirmation of spirit active and present everywhere, and to serve that spirit, rather than to mediate it.

The conventional understanding is in our nineteenth century roots.

Channing saw the mission of the church to be the extension of God's benevolence through us:

"God calls you, both by nature and revelation, to a fellowship in his philanthropy; that he has placed you in social relations, for the very end of rendering you ministers and representatives of his benevolence . . ."¹⁵

Universalists saw the mission of the church to be the means through which "the whole family of mankind" would be restored to

¹⁴J. Ronald Engel, "For the Love of the World: The Public Ministry of James Reeb," *Unitarian Universalism 1989: Selected Essays*, p. 122.

¹⁵William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," *An American Reformation*, n. 5 above, p. 128.

"holiness and happiness."¹⁶

The prophetic sisterhood saw the church to be the home-base for the reform of society:

"All the principles of the well-built church home -- the down-to earth workability, the democratic provision of comfort, and the spirit of magnanimity fostered by self-sufficiency -- culminated in the idea that a church's responsibility was not confined to its immediate family but included the whole of society."¹⁷

James Freeman Clarke saw the mission of the church to be helping people "get good, and do good", and imaged the church as the living body of Christ. It is

"his hands, by which we shall touch and heal the wretched; his feet, to go through the world, to search out its evils and sins; his mouth, through which he shall speak words of divinest help and encouragement."¹⁸

The community ministry movement pushes beyond any image of the congregation as the exclusive embodiment of God's ministry in the world, of religious fellowship as the sacred center from which we go out into the secular and hurting world to serve and reform, or as the center into which all of us will be drawn as we come into right relationship with God.

It calls the church to a mission of recognizing and supporting the presence of holiness in all of life.

The Ordained Ministry: History and Change

As a denomination we have moved to affirm that ministries beyond the setting of the parish make sense to us. We want to recognize and support them. We have decided that we will fellowship and ordain people for such ministries. Some congregations are finding ways to be in relationship with community ministers. We can see that there is grounding for community ministry in our theological heritage, and in our

¹⁶George Hunston Williams, *American Universalism* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1971), p. 9.

¹⁷Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1990), p. 112.

¹⁸James Freeman Clarke, "The Christian Church," *An American Reformation*, n. 5 above, p. 299.

present convictions. We recognize and celebrate the long line of activist Unitarians and Universalists who call us to carry on their witness.

But we have put ourselves at odds with our own polity. We have enacted a vision of the purpose of the church that differs from the vision embodied in our existing congregational polity.

Our congregational polity traces its roots back to New England Puritanism. The Cambridge Platform, adopted by the New England churches in 1648, is a foundational document for understanding our polity. Here one finds a distinct vision of the purpose of the church.

"A congregational church [consists of] a company of saints by calling, united into one body by an holy covenant, for the public worship of God, and the mutual edification of one another, in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus."¹⁹

If we translate this into contemporary language, we would say a church comes into existence when a group of people who share a desire for a spiritual life decide to make a commitment to get together to support one another's spiritual growth and to worship.

This is the vision of the church that our polity embodies.

It is interesting to note that this vision matches rather closely how the life of many of our churches today could be characterized. The emphasis is on fellowship and mutual support, on being community with and for each other, on togetherness, on being there for one another. Membership, now as then, is a matter of making a commitment to join together with others in the search for spiritual growth. It is not a matter of confessing to a set of beliefs or a creed, or even assenting to the principles and purposes. Our churches are voluntary associations of people who wish to be together to encourage one another's search, and to worship together.

In a recent seminar for congregations in the San Francisco Bay Area, Patti Lawrence, Dean of Students and Congregational Outreach at Starr King School, and I asked church leaders to articulate what their congregations were accomplishing of value. The consistent response was "fellowship." The church provided a sense of home, a place of safety and community. We affirmed the importance of this, but noted the absence of a sense of mission in the larger world.

¹⁹The Cambridge Platform, 1648 (Earl Morse Wilbur Rare Book Collection, Starr King School).

In the Cambridge Platform, the purpose of the ordained ministry is understood rather modestly. The minister is one who is elected from among the members of the church to fill the ministerial office. The Platform sees the ministerial work to be those things necessary to lead the church, specifically the work of teaching, preaching, administration, worship, and pastoral care (visiting and praying over the sick). There is a simplicity to this, like New England churches themselves. The emphasis is on the practical and the useful.

"[T]hough officers be not absolutely necessary to the simple being of churches . . . the Lord Jesus, out of his tender compassion, hath appointed and ordained officers, which he would not have done, if they had not been useful and needful for the church."²⁰

The basic features of New England congregationalism remain with us. It is our practice that congregations elect their own leadership. The minister is called by vote of the congregation, not appointed by any churchly authorities above and beyond the congregation. The congregation retains sole authority to ordain people to the ministry. (For the New England Puritans ordination was the celebrative act that installed the elected person into the ministerial office). What is precious and unique in this tradition is its clarity that ordination belongs in the hands of the people, not in institutional power structures. This affirmation gives flesh to the belief that the spirit is at work in all people, not isolated in select religious authorities.

In brief, our historical understanding of the ordained ministry is

Relational: A community ordains, and the relationship is one of trust.

Practical: Practical experience has shown that the work of the church flourishes when there are good leaders. The minister's work is to support and lead the life of the congregation.

Functional: The holder of the ministerial office is responsible for the key functions of preaching, teaching, leading worship, administration, and pastoral care.

In the context of this polity and tradition there is no meaning to ordained ministry outside of the relationship between minister and people within the circle of the covenanted community.

²⁰*Ibid.*

Unitarian Universalist historian Conrad Wright, who confesses to be a "primitive congregationalist", takes a crisp position:

"So far as I am concerned, persons in ministerial fellowship who abandon the parish for a career, such as teaching -- even teaching in a divinity school -- are ex-ministers."²¹

Wright is speaking as a historian, who believes "a living tradition, responding to present needs without denying its basic integrity, can serve as well."²²

In affirming community ministry, we have made a move that stretches our tradition in a way that perhaps obscures its basic integrity. The significance of the decision to fellowship and ordain community ministers must not be missed. It is a change that goes to the heart of our mission.

We have come to a place where our historic polity embodies one vision of the mission of the church, and our practices in the realm of ordaining and fellowshiping ministers embody a different vision. In other words, we have decided (not very consciously) to operate with two different visions of the purpose of the church simultaneously. We are seeing double.

Congregational polity says the purpose of the church is for people to come together for mutual support in their spiritual growth and for worship.

The advent of community ministry says the purpose of the church is to "steward the social order," recognizing and supporting the presence and work of the Spirit in all of life.

One is a circle drawing people together, face to face, for mutual support. The other finds the face of God in the midst of life. One attends to our needs for community. The other serves the common good.

Of course it is possible to be two things at once. The visions may be complementary or in creative tension with one another. They are not necessarily competing visions. But it will help if we can recognize the degree to which our basic polity and our ministerial practices have diverged.

²¹Conrad Wright, *Walking Together* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1989) p. 20.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

Expanding Tradition, Finding New Meaning

The tradition can be expanded to give meaning to community ministry as an ordained ministry. We could say the community minister is one who is elected by a congregation for the ministerial office of service in the community beyond the parish. The relationship is one of trust. The community minister supports and leads the work of the congregation's service and witness in the wider community. The ministerial functions of preaching, teaching, leading worship, administration, and pastoral care are transposed to another setting. "Parish" becomes "Society." Neil Shadle makes this transposition, noting that for New England Puritans "the parish was the basic political unit; the parish was the whole town . . ."

"When "parish" is understood in this holistic sense, the *priestly* ministry discerns the liturgical character of . . . community events . . . the *teaching* ministry interprets the civic faith we share, helping us understand what it means to be a free people together . . . the *pastoral* ministry is offered to everyone in need . . . the *prophetic* ministry works through the various community institutions to call the powers and principalities to accountability."²³

Historically, the meaning of ordination is tied to the central purpose of the church. For example, when the central purpose of the church has been understood to be the saving of souls and the saving of souls is understood to come about through hearing and believing the good news of the Gospel, then the central work of the ordained ministry is preaching and teaching. This is the essence of the protestant and particularly the American evangelical understanding of the ordained ministry. Minister means preacher.

When the central purpose of the church has been understood to be the mediation of healing grace, and grace is understood to be mediated through ritual practices, then the central work of the ordained ministry is presiding at worship. Minister means priest. This is has been at the heart of the Roman Catholic understanding of ministry.

When the central purpose of the church has been understood to be the living presence of Christ then the ordained minister is the pastor, the caretaking shepherd, whose work is compassion and mercy, the care of soul. This image has always had some power

²³Neil Shadle, "Community Ministry and the True Church of Democracy," (Ft. Worth General Assembly: The James Reeb Memorial Lecture sponsored by The Society for the Larger Ministry, 1994) p. 5.

and presence.

When the central purpose of the church has been to establish the kingdom of God on earth, then the ordained person has been a civic leader -- a king, ruler, or judge, or even a city manager. This image has been part of the Puritan tradition, with its theocratic hope that America would be 'the city set on the hill.' Minister then is a religious civic leader.

Clearly, the meaning of the ordained ministry has never been fixed. It shifts with the social and historical context, and with the vision of the church's mission.²⁴

We are living in a time of significant shift within Unitarian Universalism. According to Conrad Wright, there is a need for a clearer sense of the purpose of the church now.²⁵ Perhaps our development of new categories for fellowshipped ministers is the arena in which a re-imagining of the purpose of the church is emerging.

With this shift, some meanings of ordination that have been in the shadow may come more into the light, because they illuminate the fresh sense of purpose. In particular, as we move into practices that say the mission of the church is to recognize and support the powers of creation, sustenance, and transformation in all of life, we may find ourselves returning to an ancient shamanistic understanding of ministry.

We know that there are some human beings in whom "the light shines." The presence and power of something holy at work in human life is sensed and known in their presence. Their character itself witnesses to that "something far more deeply interfused." There is a quality of tenderness, or strength, passion, or focus, depth, or prophetic restlessness, insight, or love. There are some who have a capacity to move in and through the realms of pain, anguish, breakdown, dream, death, and birth. These are people who can live in the liminal spaces of transition, crisis and change, and can stay with the movement of the soul. The community does well to recognize the significance of these people to its wellbeing. Perhaps part of the mission of our church is to acknowledge such people with a ritual of

²⁴See H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams, *The Ministry in Historical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All Its Aspects*, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1974); Ronald E. Osborn, *Creative Disarray: Models of Ministry in a Changing America*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1991).

²⁵See the final chapter of *Walking Together*, n. 20 above.

recognition and trust. Perhaps when we discover a shaman among us we should ordain her or him.

The tasks of ordained ministry have always, in part, been understood as gifts -- the gift of speaking, teaching, offering care, making visible the presence of God through one's loving spirit. While the religious community has recognized the importance of training and education in the development of the skills and resources necessary to perform the tasks of ministry, we never seem to fully lose our awareness that "charism" -- giftedness -- is part of the equation.

It is possible that we will approach community ministry primarily through the lens of "professionalism," defining and legitimating it through requirements for professional skill and development. Then fellowship and ordination will mean admittance into the profession by compliance with professional standards.

But the tasks of ministry are primarily gifts. I hope we will not let the charismatic understanding disappear, but simply affirm that it is augmented through training, apprenticeship, education, experience, and collegial and community accountability.

Community ministry invites a refreshed sense of grace. It asks us to deepen our capacity as a religious community to acknowledge the presence of holy power at work in life, and to see it and respect it in one another. This will require both courage and humility.

What It Means When a Congregation Ordains a Community Minister

I would venture the following interpretation of what it means to ordain someone to community ministry.

A congregation ordains a person to community ministry based on its understanding that its purpose as a religious community includes a mission in, with, to, and for the larger society:

to comfort the grieving,
companion the sick,
to witness for peace,
to work for racial justice,
to liberate human beings from oppression,
to feed the hungry,
to live in right relationship with the earth . . .

By ordaining a community minister a congregation says yes to a person and to a calling. It says:

We choose to affirm that our mission is not only to ourselves but to the larger society.

We choose to send this person to speak for the congregation, to announce in the flesh what this religious community understands its mission in the larger community to be. We send a person who we believe witnesses by who they are. We trust the person as one whose life and work speak of the presence of holy power at work in life.

We choose to open ourself to prophetic critique, recognizing that those in our midst who live in the liminal space between church and world are uniquely positioned to interpret the larger society to the religious community. We ask that one we ordain to community ministry be an educator within the religious community, interpreting particular realities and needs of the world to us, to the end that our congregation as a whole might be of more service.

We choose to witness to an understanding that religious community is not the exclusive sphere of the holy or the religious. The human quest for healing, meaning, justice, joy, and abundant life is not bounded by any institutional space. Rather, it is rooted in the presence of God in all of life. Community ministers are a living reminder of the limits of the covenanted religious community and the largeness of the holy, which exists *out of bounds*, beyond our created forms.

Postscript

I have always believed that ministries of social engagement and service in settings beyond the parish were vitally important.

But I have been troubled that the traditions of congregational polity provide little or no basis for affirming, recognizing, and supporting such ministries. Does Unitarian Universalism care about its own polity enough to seriously engage with the ways in which recognizing and supporting "non-parochial ministry" involves a significant change in polity? If we recognize that polity is a theological expression, and we want coherence and integrity in our institutional life, wouldn't we do well to pay attention to fundamental questions regarding the theology and mission of the church and the place of ordained ministry within that mission when we act to establish categories for fellowship?

In my experience, the denomination has difficulty doing this. Our General Assembly voted to establish community ministry as a category for fellowship and left it to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee to "work out the details." The Fellowship

Committee has a heavy load of work which its members carry out with diligence, but it has little time to rethink fundamental issues regarding the ministry. Nor does it have the power or responsibility to define our polity -- and it is unclear who does have this responsibility. This denominational carelessness disquiets me, because I see it as crippling to denominational effectiveness.

At the same time, I have been troubled by the rhetoric of people "demanding their right to be a minister", and calling the denomination to establish a track in ministry based on a claim of unfair, unjust treatment. This rhetoric has seemed unfortunate to me. I don't think the ministry is about rights, or about "getting my needs met." I believe this rhetoric has been center stage in the present environment of Unitarian Universalism because a "rights argument" and a "needs argument" is easily heard and meets with active response.

Human beings always have issues about attention and recognition, and these needs deserve respect. But the leaders who have been advocating for community ministry have actually been speaking about much larger issues: they have been pushing for a larger understanding of the mission of Unitarian Universalism and the concept of the church. They are moved by passionate concern about the "broken-heartedness" in life, and by deep theological conviction.

I want these larger issues to be taken seriously by the denomination.

I want our denomination to be more careful and less cavalier about its polity, so that our practices (from the congregation's practice of ordination and direct support for ministry, to the Association's work in the Department of Ministry and the Ministerial Fellowship Committee) undergird and support our mission rather than block it, dilute it, or confuse it.

I have been troubled about our "make it up as you go along" approach to ordination and to fellowshiping. It invites criticism that we as a religious movement are sloppy and unserious. And it leaves passionate, gifted people who are prepared to commit themselves to a life of religious leadership and service to our denomination without a denomination that is capable of commitment to them.

I do not want the affirmation of community ministry to amount to support for a careless and cavalier approach to polity; support for a view of ministry that is focused in rights and needs; or support for practices of ordination that are thoughtless or meaningless. If our movement is to respond to the remarkable opportunity for renewal and strengthening that community ministry puts before us, we need fresh eyes to see,

lively minds, and hearts that do not falter, to hold us to the task.

I want something for people who are called to community ministry. I want them to be recognized, affirmed, and supported by a denomination that is grounded in a sense of mission that serves "the creative, sustaining and transforming powers, not ultimately of our making," that recognizes our need to be responsible in our relationships with one another and the earth, and that has established institutional practices and patterns that liberate "a larger ministry."

I want us to know what we are doing, and to do it well.

I believe this is possible.

The hand that is laid upon us asks our commitment and holds us in Love.

Rebecca Parker
February 21, 1995

DARE WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY?

The call to ministry is a call
to freedom and fullness of being.

Starr King School Catalog
1992-1993

Here I am, fifty-one years old, and finally in seminary, the place, the dictionary tells us, that's for "training priests, ministers, or rabbis." But I have come to this place by way of teaching writing as a spiritual discipline/questing and so I look closer, and find that "seminary" is rooted in the Latin word "seminarium: seed plot, garden, nursery." Yes, that feels more like what I am about here at Starr King School: I am finally saying YES to the promise and possibility contained in the words of our Unitarian Universalist Association's Principles and Purposes. As a delegate to the two General Assemblies that voted to adopt these words ten years ago, I find I am finally ready to risk that we mean them. For if "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" that plays out in our "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth" through a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" is indeed to be allowed its subsequent unfolding, the opening quote rephrases itself:

the call to freedom and fullness of being
is a call to ministry...

Many of us who are in seminary right now have come from other careers and out of congregations in which we were challenged spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, practically and prophetically. For many of us, seminary is the place to go deeper into the root systems of our very beings and where, in the words of Starr King Dean Bob Kimball, "we come to work out our own Salvation" in its original meaning of health; wholeness...all the while being held within the container of a faith tradition which "draws from direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." But what happens when inreach moves to outreach again?

Our living tradition also affirms and promotes the inspiration "to deepen our understanding and expand our vision." Community ministry is perhaps part of that vision.

Although the seedling of community ministry appears to be young, the roots actually go deeply into our tradition. Just one example is that of our Transcendentalist heritage. What the Transcendentalists were about was SELF CULTURE, i.e. cultivating the Self that was equated with Spirit or Soul. And this led to ethical consequences:

the educational reforms of Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody; the Christian socialism of William Henry Channing; Margaret Fuller's feminism and involvement in the Roman Revolution of 1848; Thoreau's civil disobedience; George Ripley's Brook Farm; James Freeman Clarke's Church of the Disciples; and Parker's commitment to abolitionism and women's rights. These were not accidents or deviations but logical consequences of the Transcendentalist social ethic. They were the inevitable outcome of a belief in a common human nature and the desire to integrate spiritual aspirations and moral behavior...leading "its adherents into the world more often than away from it."

(Barry Andrews, 1991)

In short, the seedling of community ministry has sprouted from and among us. It is here, now...what will we do with it? We could rip it up and fling it onto a trash heap, wary that it will take root elsewhere. We could abandon it through neglect and not watering it. We could keep it "pot-bound" within our existing concepts of ministry until it strangles. We could cripple it through pruning to fit existing images of what ministry looks like. Or, could we embody the message offered in The Talmud:

Every blade of grass has its Angel
that bends over it and whispers:
"grow, grow."

Gail Collins-Ranadive
February, 1995

THE SOCIETY FOR THE LARGER MINISTRY:
A HISTORY OF IMPASSIONED VISION BROUGHT TO LIFE

We, as people living in a world that is both dying and seeking to be reborn, who are shaken to our very roots by the massiveness and depth of planetary and human suffering, are empowered by a driving passion to bear witness to that suffering, participate in its transformation, and affirm the inherent glory of life.

--Opening words of SLM Proclamation

I. The SLM Proclamation¹

The Society for the Larger Ministry took as the theme of its December 1993 annual conference "Shaping Our Future." The shaping process consisted of five distinct conversations beginning with the shared memories of SLM's history. Many participants specially remembered the November 1988 conference at Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, for at that gathering they drafted the SLM Proclamation. This Proclamation was no droning mission statement full of intellectualized lists of duties; this was an outpouring of their very souls. It expresses their covenants to respond to pain and brokenness and awaken hope; to engage in ministries with Unitarian Universalist congregations and the larger community; to celebrate diversity; and to challenge one another to analyze and act upon the causes of human hurt and separation.

The Proclamation describes what happened that night at Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago when these people gathered to sign what they had written:

[W]e join hands with the community of faith in acknowledging the larger ministry which addresses our common vision. We call upon our denomination to recognize a variety of lay and ordained ministries as embodiments of the Unitarian Universalist principles and purposes.... Such compassionate, liberating, prophetic ministries are at the very heart of our religious tradition.

¹The full text of the Proclamation appears in the Appendix.

The next morning at the conclusion of the conference, a dozen SLM members preached at different UU churches across the Chicago area. At the First Unitarian Church across the street from Meadville/Lombard, the sermon was given jointly by Jody Shipley, Carolyn McDade, and David Arksey, that church's Minister-at-large. It was entitled "Community Ministry in Our Midst: A Voice for Justice."

At the December 1993 conference, Judy Morris shared her memory of the Chicago gathering:

I remember being locked up in Neil Shadle's office. I was one of the privileged few who got to take the work of the sub-committees and go back and knock those words out one by one. And we crafted each and every word, and we'd bring it out, and people would revise it, and they'd send it to small groups, and they'd send it back.... And we signed that statement finally in candle light, and I sang harmony with Carolyn McDade on "Spirit of Life." She was standing next to me, and Doug Morgan Strong stood across from her, and he signed it for her. I was in tears because I was singing with Carolyn McDade, and Carolyn was in tears because Doug was signing her song."

Judy Morris's memory of everyone signing the Proclamation in candle light and Douglas Morgan Strong signing "Spirit of Life" (in sign language) is emblematic of the kind of organization SLM is. The people of SLM bring forth their shared ministries in loving community with each other. Their labors are labors of love. And they have brought forth bounteous fruit since their founding in 1987. Their brochure describes SLM this way:

SLM is a Unitarian Universalist movement of lay ministers and ordained clergy committed to promoting a broad spectrum of healing and social justice ministries. We believe that only through many diverse forms of ministry can we heal the broken, create justice, and live in harmony with the spirit of life. We hold a vision of a larger ministry that sees the world as its parish.

The full name of the organization is Society for the Larger Ministry, Unitarian Universalist. Its bylaws express how it intends to implement its vision. The purpose of SLM is:

1. to foster UU ministries to the unempowered, the wounded, the oppressed, and to the diverse concerns of age, race, class, institution, life-style, sex, capacity and planetary survival.

2. to serve as a forum for common concerns and interests of such larger ministries;
3. to encourage the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and congregations to embody a commitment to the larger ministry through their programs and budgets;
4. to conduct programs of continuing education for our constituents;
5. to promote collegiality among all ministers;
6. to offer programs of education utilizing the special perspectives of its constituents;
7. to act as a voice for the concerns of members of the Society relating to the UUA, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) and other groups.

II. The Spiritual Legacy of James Reeb and Joseph Tuckerman

Many of the founders of SLM had a history in civil rights work and peace work. It is indicative of their respect for their own history that the SLM annual lecture at General Assembly is named in memory of James Reeb, a Unitarian Universalist minister who was martyred in Selma, Alabama, on March 11, 1965. He had taken part in the Selma march in response to Martin Luther King's call for ministerial support. Later that evening he was attacked, and two days later he died from a blow to his head.

Dana Greeley was President of the UUA when James Reeb was killed. Greeley wrote of him:

[P]erhaps no other Unitarian minister in this century has exerted as much influence as he did. To cite just one index of that influence: On the Monday following the Reeb memorial service President Lyndon Johnson delivered to a joint session of Congress his civil rights special message which resulted in legislation that even John F. Kennedy had not been able to obtain, and that perhaps Lyndon Johnson would not have been motivated or able to obtain except for the martyrdom of James Reeb.²

²Dana McLean Greeley, *25 Beacon Street and other recollections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 107.

James Reeb should be remembered not only for the way he died, however, but also for the way he lived. He left his prestigious ministerial position at Washington, D.C.'s All Souls Church to go and live and work with the poor in Roxbury, one of the most deteriorated parts of Boston's inner city. His friend Ronald Engel, a professor at Meadville/Lombard Theological School, gave the Reeb Lecture in 1989. The lecture was about their friendship, about James Reeb. Ronald Engel describes his own and James Reeb's absorption in the early 1960's in redefining their faith. The description is a statement of theological grounding of community ministry:

We were concerned to reject what we perceived as the prevailing model of religious understanding -- a model which assumed God acts through the church to save the world. Or, if one is humanistically inclined, the assumption that the church lives out its spiritual ideals by putting them "to work" in the world outside. In either case, we rejected any notion that the church is the sacred center -- the holy place -- out of which people go to save the world or "do" social action.

We were concerned to affirm a radical this-worldly model of religious understanding that began with the world, saw the divine at work within the world, creating, sustaining and redeeming it, and called the church to witness to that saving reality. According to this model, the world is the theatre of divine activity and essentially good in spite of radical evil. Humanistically conceived, the world is pregnant with the actions of ordinary men and women who, along with the enduring vitality of all forms of life, are the sources of its perpetual renewal. The world is filled with sacred centers, and it is the mission of the church to identify, celebrate, and serve the creativity of those places. To the degree that it does this, the church can itself become an actor in the making of the sacred story, and a truly holy place.³

SLM looks further into history also for its founding spirit in the memory of Joseph Tuckerman, who began a ministry to Boston seaman in 1812 while he was serving a parish in Chelsea, Massachusetts. With the support of the then new American Unitarian Association, he went on to become a minister-at-large serving Boston's poor for 14 more years before he died. The Benevolent Frater-

³J. Ronald Engel, "For the Love of the World: The Public Ministry of James Reeb," *Unitarian Universalism 1989: Selected Essays*, pp. 117-128, at p. 122.

nity was formed in 1834 to carry on his work. It is still a thriving organization 160 years later, now formally named the UU Urban Ministry though commonly and affectionately referred to as "Ben Frat." It is supported by 57 UU societies in the Boston area. In the early 1990's Ben Frat ordained Cheng Imm Tan and Peter Thoms, two UU community ministers on its staff. Cheng Imm Tan was fellowshiped by the MFC with the express understanding that she would not join a UU society, that her religious community was not a single congregation but the whole of Ben Frat.

III. Precursor Organizations and the Merger into SLM

The founders of SLM were generally chaplains, pastoral counselors, and professors at theological schools. The event that began coalescing the spirit of these people into forming an organization was a gathering at the Philadelphia General Assembly in 1981. At the invitation of Robert Rafford, about twenty chaplains, pastoral counselors, and others gathered and agreed that there was a need for an organization of ministers outside of the parish. This group began to meet informally at the annual General Assembly, coordinated by Robert Rafford and Spencer Lavan. They called themselves "Extra-Parochial Clergy." They were ordained and fellowshiped ministers.

At the same time another group was forming, initiated by Tom Chulak of the Department of Extension. They called themselves "Community Focused Ministers." This group included some lay ministers as well as ordained and fellowshiped ministers. In general, they were interested in community service and peace organizations or working with special populations such as the homeless or battered women.

This group held a consultation on community ministry in November 1986 in Boston. It was organized by Ben Frat and the UUA Department of Extension, with the assistance of a UUA grant. They met part of the time at the UUA offices and part of the time at the Church of the United Community in Roxbury. Steve Shick remembers that gathering with "a real feeling that we had found kindred spirits. This group had a lot of wounds, but it didn't dwell on the wounds.... We shared a vision of ministry that was beyond the walls of the parish but that was also rooted there."

Representatives of the Extra-Parochial Clergy met with David Pohl, Director of the UUA's Department of Ministry. The steering committee secured a grant from the Grants Panel for a conference to be held at Little Rock in 1987 just before General Assembly. This conference was planned jointly by the steering committees for both the Extra-Parochial Clergy and the Community Focused Ministers, with Robert Rafford as the coordinator. The theme of the conference was "What Is Ministry?" There were two keynote speeches. Spencer Lavan spoke on "Extra-Parochial Ministry in

Historic Perspective," and William Jones spoke on "Ministry: A Theological and Philosophical Perspective."

At Little Rock, the Extra-Parochial Clergy and the Community Focused Ministers merged under the new name of the Society for the Larger Ministry.

In November 1987 the SLM met at the Berkeley Fellowship of UUs. The planning committee had been meeting as early as the previous May when they were still calling themselves Community Focused Ministers. The minutes of the May 13 planning committee meeting include a note from Til Evans: "Our theology of community focused ministry emphasizes relatedness; it is a theology of relationship ... a dangerous theology."

The goal of this first conference under the name of SLM was to provide an opportunity for community ministers to get acquainted. When the participants arrived, they found the walls covered with blank posters. Each participant then designed a poster to share his or her ministry. At this conference, they also explored how to define "good practice" in community ministry and the theological base for that practice. As part of the preparation for the conference, Jody Shipley wrote the following in a "Reflection on the Theological Sustenance for Good Practice in Community Ministry":

The simple measure of good practice is in the question "Is what I do empowering to those I serve?" It is a question that tests all action ... that separates out ministry that is self serving from real ministry.

In a faith such as ours that stands firmly on the belief that each has the right and the wisdom to discover and follow their own religious path, empowering that journey is the major focus of a liberal ministry....

Empowerment is ... conveyed in how we listen ... how we speak ... how we touch ... what we choose to do and say, and where we choose to be. Empowerment seeks to create the environment that warms the bud into opening ... that urges the journey on ... that says "yes" and that challenges. Empowering looks outward....

A major issue addressed by the SLM at the November 1987 conference was who could be a member of SLM. As David Gilmartin remembers:

The discussion really was of theological questions: Who is a minister? Is it someone who is clergy trained? Is it someone who is ordained? What defines a minister and a ministry? And resoundingly, the opinion at that

meeting -- and the decision -- came down on the side of inclusiveness. It was going to be an organization that was inclusive of lay people as well as clergy.

The original bylaws indicated that membership would be "open to all persons engaged in ministry who are in harmony with the purposes of the Society." By 1994 the bylaws had been revised to open membership "to all persons who are in harmony with the purposes of the Society." SLM's inclusivity is also reflected in its brochure's description of SLM as a "movement of lay ministers and ordained clergy." This inclusivity is reflected in the Proclamation as well: "We call upon our denomination to recognize a variety of lay and ordained ministries as embodiments of the Unitarian Universalist principles and purposes."

The belief in the validity and importance of lay ministries has remained firm in SLM's collective thinking; however, action on that belief has sometimes seemed eclipsed by the organization's attention to achieving recognition of community ministries of professional clergy through fellowshipping by the MFC. In fact, achieving what is commonly referred to as "the third track" of fellowshipping for community ministers (in addition to previously existing tracks for parish ministers and ministers of religious education) was the major work of SLM until the UUA bylaws were revised to accomplish it in 1991. Bringing real vitality to the third track has been the SLM's major work ever since.

At the June 1988 General Assembly, SLM received the Holmes-Weatherly Award, given by the UUA's Department of Social Justice in recognition of the group's pursuit of social justice, exemplifying the spirit of John Haynes Holmes and Arthur L. Weatherly. When Jody Shipley, as chair of the SLM steering committee, wrote to the membership about the award, she emphasized that they should understand the award as recognizing their many individual ministries.

The SLM fall conferences in 1988 and 1989 were both supported by grants from the UUA Grants Panel. The 1988 Chicago conference, when the Proclamation was drafted, had as its theme "Continuing the Conversation." Instead of focusing on a keynote speaker, the group worked with Rev. Dick Simpson of Chicago Clergy and Laity Concerned as a consultant on developing the organization's direction. They began by meeting in ministry working groups: pastoral counseling, chaplaincy, peace and justice ministries, community/urban ministries, academic ministries, and healing ministries. Each group drafted a theological position paper, and out of these grew the Proclamation.

The grant application for the 1989 conference reflects SLM's growth from 35 members at its founding in 1987 to 160 in September

1989. In the grant proposal, Jody Shipley wrote on the denominational significance of the work of organizing SLM:

The gathering and identification of the work of community ministry through the Society for the Larger Ministry is changing our denomination's view of the breadth and possibilities of our mission. Community ministers are being asked to participate in more denominational activities such as this upcoming convocation, district programs, congregational worship and programs, installations and ordinations....

Community Ministry isn't new, but it is less invisible than it once was. It challenges us to find cooperative ways to extend our UU ministry in a congregational structure that tends to keep congregations isolated from one another.

Because community ministry reaches deep into the meaning of our work as a movement it calls us to examine many important aspects of our denomination: ordination, fellowshiping, congregations' relationships and groupings, education, social justice responsibilities and the nature of ministry today.

The questions that SLM and the growing network of community ministry raise are far reaching. The changes we are seeing in these first two years of SLM's existence are significant, but we are working to move ahead slowly and carefully and to give ourselves time to think through each new step as we broaden the definition of our ministry.

The 1989 fall conference in Brookline, Massachusetts, had as its theme "One Common Call." The theme of the 1990 fall conference was "What Is Ministry?" This theme was in direct response to the evaluations of the 1989 conference, which asked that the next year they address the same question as the Commission on Appraisal and the MFC were addressing as they considered fellowshiping community ministers. The 1989 evaluations also led to the 1990 conference planners issuing a call for papers in advance to enable people to think more deeply ahead of time about the issues affecting them. The panel of readers were Jane Boyajian, Til Evans, and Ken Sawyer, who was then a member of the MFC. All who submitted papers were invited to bring copies to share and to serve as the initial members of a fishbowl discussion about the one paper chosen to be read: "What Is Ministry: Using Jesus as a Model" by Wendy Hunter Roberts.

Another special feature of the 1990 conference in San Francisco was that all of the parish ministers who were members of the

Pacific Central District chapter of the UUMA were invited to join the conference for the Saturday morning program -- and then to be the guests of SLM for lunch.

The year 1990 was noteworthy for SLM also as the 25th anniversary of James Reeb's death. The UUA convened a Reeb Memorial Committee to plan an appropriate commemoration at the 1990 General Assembly in Milwaukee. Neil Shadle chaired the committee. The commemoration included a choreographed dance production written by Rosemary Bray McNatt and danced by James Reeb's daughter. Dan Aldridge gave the SLM's Reeb Lecture that year.

IV. Work on Fellowshiping for Community Ministers

In 1989 SLM had formed a Task Force on Ministerial Fellowship, focused on developing a positive relationship with the UUMA, and promoting dialogue about community ministry among UU leadership in the UUMA, the MFC, and the UUA Department of Ministry. There was a Convocation on Ministry by invitation that year, sponsored by the UUA, which included Jody Shipley and Steve Shick as SLM representatives, and at which Roberta Mitchell made a presentation about community ministry. The General Assembly's preliminary vote to change the bylaws to add the third track came in 1990, with the final vote to follow in 1991.⁴

The SLM worked non-stop ahead of the 1991 General Assembly to make that bylaw change come to pass. Cluster groups formed in New England and the San Francisco Bay Area. The Bay Area group put out a brochure called "Bay Area Community Ministries." On the cover was this story:

Recently a UU minister in preliminary fellowship served for 10 years in the prison system of North Carolina as a chaplain. Christmas of 1984, while celebrating a Christ-

⁴The amended bylaw (Article XI, Sec. C-11.1) reads as follows:

Each member society has the exclusive right to call and ordain its own minister or ministers, but the Association has the exclusive right to admit ministers to ministerial fellowship with the Association. *Fellowship may be for the purposes of parish, religious education and/or community ministry as determined by action of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee.* No minister shall be required to subscribe to any particular creed, belief, or interpretation of religion in order to obtain and hold fellowship.

mas service, one prisoner knifed another. The minister intervened to prevent a further assault. It took the guards several minutes to get into the closed chapel. The minister said, "I thought I was going to die right then and there; and later I said to myself, if I had died who in my denomination would even know I was there and why."

The SLM steering committee developed a position paper on the third track. They set as their first priority for 1991 professional development through work with the Department of Ministry and the UUA's ad hoc Task Force on Community Ministry. John Weston and Neil Shadle were appointed by the UUA's Committee on Committees to represent SLM's position on this task force, which had the task of defining community ministry and drafting the specific wording for the proposed revision of the bylaw.

A preliminary statement from the Task Force includes the following characterization of its report:

The language ... defining Community Ministry is characterized by a spirit of inclusion and liberal definition, including one criterion that the person's work "shall represent a ministry for him/her" and that the work "is characterized by the following kinds of leadership in the context of the Association's Principles and Purposes: pastoral, preaching, teaching, celebrative, public, and organizational."

V. Shifting the Focus from Visionary to Implementing

When the SLM began to foresee the achievement of the third track, they turned their focus to implementing it in support of community ministers. They began to talk about such issues as getting a community minister's slot on the MFC; the SLM operating as an ordaining body, similar to Ben Frat; getting community ministers delegate status at General Assembly; getting the UU *World* to do an article on ordained community ministers⁵; getting community ministers staff support at the Department of Ministry; and getting placement services from the UUA.

⁵The envisioned article, "Outside Church Walls" by Neil Chethik, appeared in the September/October 1994 issue of *World*. It features the community ministries of Cheng Imm Tan, Donald Robinson, Barbara Jo Sorensen, and David Pettee.

In May of 1991, the SLM newsletter, then called *Crossroads*,⁶ reported that the library at Meadville/Lombard Theological School would be the repository for the SLM archives, thanks to librarian Neil Gerdes, a member of SLM. Neil Shadle, a professor at Meadville/Lombard, volunteered to collect the archives.⁷ This newsletter also reported that the Department of Ministry was supporting implementing the third track bylaw change and was committed to providing services to community ministers. Moreover, it was reportedly the consensus of the UUA's Task Force on Community Ministry that eventually it would be desirable to have a staff person to facilitate community ministry. The newsletter quoted a working paper of the Task Force:

Inclusion of Community Ministries in our Association is a wonderful opportunity for us all and will enhance our ability to grow and to be more inclusive of peoples of differing cultures and class. In that spirit, we urge a positive approach by all concerned.... In particular, we urge settled Parish Ministers and Ministers of Religious Education to make themselves aware of community ministries in their areas and to encourage them and to embrace them to the fullest extent possible. We also urge Community Ministers to, in similar spirit, take on the responsibility of networking with and informing their parish colleagues of their ministries. We encourage district chapters of ministers to include Community Ministers to the fullest extent possible in meaningful ways in their chapter meetings.

VI. 1991 -- a Banner Year for SLM

The year 1991 was a banner year for the SLM. The bylaw change establishing the community ministry track was passed unanimously by the General Assembly with no one speaking against it. The SLM sponsored a worship service at General Assembly, before the voting, at which David Pohl, the Director of the UUA Department of Ministry, preached on "To Respond, To Engage, To Celebrate, To Challenge" based on the covenants in the SLM Proclamation. He spoke directly about the bylaw amendment:

An affirmative vote for the proposed bylaw amendment at the General Assembly will enable us to formally validate this ministry, adopt appropriate academic and profes-

⁶Editors of the SLM newsletter have been the following: Jody Shipley (1988-89); Lila Forest (1990-92); Sheryl Wurl (1993); Carol Graywing (1994); and Bobbie Groth (1995).

⁷In 1995 Meadville/Lombard student Lillie Henley took on the task of organizing the archival materials.

sional requirements for its various specialized forms, and broaden our understanding of how and where we may place our particular gifts at the service of our free faith. This vote is not about bureaucratic niceties, mere window-dressing for what already exists, nor should it suggest a diluting of the meaning and standards of our ministry. It is, in my view, the very opposite. The meaning of ministry will be enriched by affirming its diversity, while our standards will be strengthened by establishing clear expectations for its several specialties.

He spoke directly to the community ministers present:

Those of you called to community ministry choose to serve a constituency beyond, though often including, those of a local parish. This choice makes you neither nobler nor less so than your colleagues in the parish. To paraphrase the apostle Paul: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same ministry. There are varieties of service, but the same ministry."

After that milestone General Assembly, the work continued. SLM continued to discuss with the Department of Ministry development of the third track and issues related to supporting community ministries, especially settlement assistance. Steve Shick and Cheng Imm Tan were appointed from SLM to a UUA/MFC Liaison Committee. SLM began to advocate strongly for a community minister on the MFC.⁸ In November Steve Shick reported to the SLM steering committee that a subcommittee of the MFC had been formed to work on appropriate academic requirements for community ministry candidates, internship sites, and renewal terms for community ministers in preliminary fellowship.

The fifth annual fall SLM conference that November in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was a celebration. Its theme was "From Vision to Reality: Growing Community Ministries." Carl Seaburg spoke on "Ministries Beyond the Local Parish: An Historical Overview," a speech recognized ever since as an SLM landmark. At the business meeting, the focuses were on strengthening cluster organizations; turning attention to lay ministry; continuing to strengthen relationships with the UUMA, the MFC, and the Department of Ministry; and undertaking to determine appropriate

⁸This was to be accomplished by amending Article VII, Section 7.6 of the UUA bylaws, which after amendment requires that of the ministers on the MFC, there must be "at least one from each category of ministry...." The amended bylaw took effect in 1993. Ralph Mero became the first community minister on the MFC.

guidelines regarding clergy sexual misconduct in the context of community ministers.

VII. The Business of Implementation

At the January 1992 steering committee meeting, Cheng Imm Tan and Steve Shick reported on having met monthly as an SLM ethics committee with David Pohl at the Department of Ministry. Peter Thoms represented SLM in meetings of a subcommittee of the MFC regarding revising Rules #10 on seminary training, #15 on preliminary fellowship, and #18 on full fellowship. The SLM steering committee drafted a proposal to the MFC for "grandparenting" (1) community ministers currently in final fellowship as parish ministers and seeking reclassification; (2) those who had been ministering for years but never approached the MFC to be fellowshipped; and (3) those who had achieved preliminary fellowship long before but had never sought final fellowship.

The January 1992 steering committee meeting reported other projects underway as well. In response to a UUMA request, the SLM ethics task force was undertaking to draft proposed revisions to the Code of Professional Practice in the UUMA Guidelines, to address matters affecting community ministers. Also, David Gilmar-tin represented SLM in working with the CENTER Committee to include community ministry in the denomination's continuing ministerial education programs. Plans were laid for surveying community ministers to discover potential mentors for community ministers in preliminary fellowship and potential internship sites.

For the fall 1992 conference on the theme of "One Common Call: Models of Ministry," SLM returned to Chicago. The program included presentations by six different community ministers: Susan Pangerl on counseling ministry, Steve Shick on peace and justice ministry, Barbara Kulcher on clown ministry, George Cairns on street ministry, Cheng Imm Tan on ministry to urban women, and Kimi Riegel on campus ministry.

At the January 1993 steering committee meeting, a number of successes were reported: SLM had been invited to participate on the planning committee for the UUA Diversity Day at the 1993 General Assembly in Charlotte; Linnea Pearson served as SLM's representative. The Department of Ministry was soliciting community internship sites and was expressing willingness to help in placement of community ministers. The Massachusetts Bay District had an SLM program at its UUMA meeting and asked Cheng Imm Tan to serve as a community minister on the district Board. Penny Hackett-Evans, Steve Shick, and Barbara Jo Sorensen were nominated to the UUMA Executive Board. Doug Sears would continue to represent SLM on the UUA's Clergy Sexual Misconduct Task Force. Cheng Imm Tan and Steve Shick would continue to meet with the

Department of Ministry. Barbara Jo Sorensen, as newly elected Chair of the steering committee, would represent SLM as liaison with all other organizations. Both candidates for presidency of the UUA, John Buehrens and Carolyn Owen-Towle, made statements strongly supportive of SLM.

An old question resurfaced at this meeting: how much to focus on building institutional support for professional community ministries and how much to focus on lay ministries? When the goals for 1993 were finally expressed, lay ministry was not explicit among them. The theme for the fall 1993 conference was originally intended to focus on lay ministry. But it was changed as a result of a pre-conference phone meeting of the steering committee, occasioned by a recommendation from Barbara Jo Sorensen that SLM disband. She was concerned about low attendance at meetings and sagging finances. Her recommendation turned out to be the shot in the arm that SLM needed.

VIII. Rejuvenation at the 1993 Point Bonita Conference

The 1993 conference was held in December at Point Bonita National Recreation Center north of San Francisco. The theme was "Shaping Our Future." The conference brochure reported its mission: "To speak and to listen, to ponder and to shape the future of the Society for Larger Ministry, Unitarian Universalist. Shall our future be a continuation of the past, or a modification, or a termination?"

It was at the opening conversation, "From Dream to Reality-- SLM History," led by Neil Shadle and Jody Shipley, that the memories poured forth, rekindling old spirits and lighting new ones among the seminarians attending. Douglas Morgan Strong led the second conversation, "Beyond Mission -- Our Accomplishments." The list engendered by that conversation was long. Those chosen by the group as most significant were these:

- . Changing UUA bylaws to recognize the third track.
- . Helping create and tap into a new spiritual paradigm.
- . Reincarnating UU's historical legacy.
- . Composing the Proclamation on SLM's theology and roots.
- . Creating a broader and deeper definition of ministry.
- . Engaging in advocacy with the UUA, UUMA, and MFC.

The full list included many other accomplishments, reflecting the spirit of the group as well as their actions. For example, they referred to creating a community of hope and opening doors. They mentioned giving themselves the respectful name "community-based" rather than "non-parish." They spoke of education, validation, and vision; making friends with parish ministers; bringing lay and professional colleagues together and thus modeling inclusiveness; and being willing to listen to each other and struggle

together to maintain the integrity of their vision. They recognized their having demonstrated that ministry is not just a "career choice" but a response to a beckoning or call, a response to an irresistible urge that is not necessarily tied to an educational or institutional process. Finally, they honored their having given shape and form to the words "inherent worth and dignity."

Ultimately the 1993 Point Bonita conference produced recommendations to continue to operate SLM by scaling down costs through reducing dues, reducing the size of the steering committee, cutting the number of newsletters per year, and moving the annual business meeting to General Assembly while retaining the fall conference in the form of concurrent conferences at three or four sites across the country.

The March 1994 newsletter reported on the collective decision at Point Bonita that the work of SLM was not completed and that there remained the goals of educating the wider movement about community ministry and the theology of "church," working with the UUA to achieve equity with colleagues in all three ministerial tracks, and working with the seminaries and the Department of Ministry to develop internship sites and mentors. The newsletter included a Letter from the Chair, in which Barbara Jo Sorensen wrote:

We see ourselves as both prophets and pioneers who will continue to push at the boundaries of our own theological roots and at the established denominational rhetoric about community-based ministry. Yet what we are about as ministers to the larger community is not new to either the Unitarians or the Universalists. We need to help our sisters and brothers remember our own history. By so doing, we hope to earn their respect and support beyond the simple recognition of a third track of ministry. I see our challenge as one of spreading the "Good News."

The SLM presence at the 1994 General Assembly in Fort Worth made clear that SLM was indeed still alive and well. The bylaw changes recommended at the Point Bonita conference were approved at the annual meeting. In addition to the new steering committee members and officers elected, student members were named as liaison to several seminaries. It was reported that Barbara Jo Sorensen had been elected to the UUMA Executive Committee for 1994-96. Elizabeth Ellis Hagler conducted an SLM-sponsored worship service on the theme of "Shared Ministry of All Believers." SLM accepted the offer of UUMA to have a presentation on community ministry in the UUMA suite.

Neil Shadle gave the Reeb Memorial Lecture at the 1994 General Assembly on "Community Ministry and the True Church of Democracy." SLM gave its first \$500 Community Ministry Award at that meeting to Lila Forest (in absentia). This new undertaking by SLM was given life by personal monetary contributions from members at the Point Bonita conference. The award was established "to identify, recognize and affirm living examples of ministers serving the larger community in the spirit of Unitarian and Universalist traditions and values." Both ordained and lay people are eligible for the award; their ministry must have a demonstrable connection or relationship with UU congregation(s) or affiliate(s).

The fall 1994 SLM newsletter reported another major accomplishment, the active support of SLM by the UU Service Committee (UUSC), including a financial commitment. The UUSC's statement reads in part:

The UUSC is pleased to join with the Society for the Larger Ministry in its new efforts to promote and expand UU community ministries. We believe that these ministries are a vital embodiment of our UU Principles and provide opportunities to share our passion for life and justice with those who have lost hope and suffer injustice. With increasing numbers of well-trained and carefully placed community ministers, Unitarian Universalism can make heretofore unimagined contributions for a better life for all people.

IX. 1994 -- A Year of Study on History, Theology, and Polity

Work was underway in 1994 to revisit history, theology, and polity related to community ministry. As a UUMA Executive Committee nominee, Barbara Jo Sorensen took part in an invitational Consultation on Ministry in the spring in Boston. Community ministry was one of the focuses of the consultation. Subsequently, the MFC consulted with SLM regarding appropriate academic standards for candidates in community ministry.

SLM sponsored a one-day seminar at Starr King School in October 1994 entitled "Community Ministries: Wellsprings of Compassion, Prophecy and Liberation," echoing the closing words of the SLM Proclamation. The keynote presentation was "A Definition of Community Ministry" by Jody Shipley. The main afternoon presentation, entitled "Transforming Ministries," was by Janelle Curlin-Taylor, whose lay ministry as a grief counselor led her eventually to seminary and to enabling other lay ministries in her church in Davis, California. The seminar included discussion tracks on theology, led by Gail Collins-Ranadive and Kurt Kuhwald; lay community ministries, led by Elizabeth Fisher, Aron Gilmartin,

and Carol Graywing; and polity, led by David Pettee and David Sammons.

SLM's 1994 annual conference was held on November 12 concurrently in Berkeley, Boston, and Chicago, on the theme of "Living the Vision: A Program of Renewal and Inspiration." The MFC accepted SLM's invitation to send a representative to the Berkeley conference to learn more about the current work of the SLM and the issues of interest and concern to community ministers. Ralph Mero attended as the MFC's representative.

X. Reflections on SLM's History: A Wider Vision of Shared Ministry

The history of the SLM may shed new light on the core concerns of the denomination regarding community ministry and community ministers. The denomination honors its congregational polity. Thus it is easy to think of the ministerial call coming from a congregation. It is also easy to think of ministers as people who serve congregations. It is not so easy to fit into the scheme ministers whose call comes from outside the parish and who have an indistinct relationship to a parish, perhaps virtually none at all.

The concerns then form themselves as questions. Who is a minister? What is a ministry? If individuals have the power to proclaim themselves as the authority by which they deem themselves ministers and their work ministry, then to whom are they accountable? Put another way, how can they be made accountable to UU institutions?

If the questions are framed this way, the answers quickly follow that such a scheme will never do, and that there must be more externally, institutionally accepted definitions that lend themselves to a more manageable scheme of accountability.

But perhaps it is the questions that are causing the difficulty. And perhaps having our ministry divided into three tracks has contributed to the difficulty even though the division appears to have been a necessary stage in the long evolution of our denominational understanding and recognition of ministry. Perhaps the difficulty may begin to lessen if we think of the tracks as ways of preparing for ministry, not ways of engaging in ministry. Thus one might sensibly choose an internship site in or out of a parish depending on one's plans. One might also choose a clinical pastoral education site accordingly. It would help untangle our thinking about ministry if we were to recognize parish and community as merely different (and ideally blending) sites of ministry, not mutually exclusive forms of it.

Some of the most active and dedicated members of the SLM are parish ministers. They are not continually asked to defend their work as ministry when they counsel ailing and troubled or engage in fund-raising or stand in protest vigils outside prisons while executions take place. Yet community ministers engaging in the same activities are asked to explain what distinguishes them from social workers. The difficulty comes of trying to define ministry by naming tasks rather than noticing how the tasks are performed and what the minister brings to the tasks that someone who is not a minister would not bring. Doubtless there are some social workers who do minister, just as probably there are some ministers who do not.

The definition problem is thus related to the accountability problem. But it is still asking the wrong question to ask how we can make community ministers accountable to congregations if they are to be legitimately considered ministers by the Unitarian Universalist institution. Neither our polity nor our theology is served by asking the minister in the community somehow to be accountable to the minister of the local parish.

At the SLM seminar at Starr King School in 1994, the discussion group on polity took up the difficulties of community ministers who try to establish and maintain relationships with local congregations and find themselves having to exert constant care not to be viewed as interfering with the parish minister's sphere of authority. As a result of these difficulties, some community ministers have begun exploring the possibility of establishing district councils to be community ministers' link with the UUA rather than local parishes. Such a system would be similar to Ben Frat, or to what happens in some other denominations, such as Presbyterian community ministers being in relation to a Presbytery, which is itself formed by member congregations.

The polity discussion track at the SLM seminar was facilitated by community minister David Pettee and his mentor, parish minister David Sammons. On the subject of community ministers fitting into the denominational polity, David Sammons concluded: "We need to shape forms that will work. And we have the ability to do that. It is not as though because we have a congregational polity you can't work through a structure like the district or individual congregations who decide to cooperate...."

As part of the discussion, David Pettee shared some of his experience becoming fellowshipped as a community minister, being ordained by the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco; and becoming affiliated with that church. He spoke of how his hospice ministry enabled him to make incarnate the spoken values of the UU General Assembly after it passed a resolution in the late 1980's on the right to die with dignity. The ensuing discussion underscored how community ministers are often especially well posi-

tioned to put the General Assembly's resolutions into action, so that the denomination does more than pay lip service to the UU Principles and Purposes.

Our history is full of reminders of the folly of not honoring ministries grounded outside the parish. There is a certain irony in the denomination's honoring James Reeb after his death, for in life he was removed from fellowship when he moved his ministry from the parish of All Souls Church in Washington, D.C. to the community of Roxbury. Many of the "prophetic sisterhood" of liberal Unitarian and Universalist clergymen at the turn of the century did some of their most important work in community ministries both during and after serving as parish ministers. In some instances, their parish ministries were not sufficiently supported by their denominations to continue, and their community ministries were not recognized as ministry at all.⁹

Yet it remains essential that community ministry be related to parish life -- for the sake of the parish as well as the minister. Jody Shipley spoke of this in her keynote talk at the 1994 SLM seminar. She spoke of what a mistake it is to think of ministry as personal, as work done by certain individuals with special talents who refer to "my ministry." Thus a duty of community ministers is to educate congregations about the community's ministry and engage congregations in it. And a duty of parish ministers is to share in that process in mutual relationship with community ministers.

As a denomination, we have begun to explore and honor the shared ministry of clergy and laity within congregations. To bring that sharing to its full power, we need to expand it to include community and parish ministers in professional ministry as well as laity ministering in and out of the parish. This view of ministry has nothing to do with tracks or hierarchical authority. The only paradigm that can accommodate it is the circle. It stresses the values of reciprocity and mutuality.

It is reminiscent of Jesus's Kingdom Movement. Jesus urged his disciples to be itinerants, to go to the people to heal them, to go and eat with them; neither to settle down and establish a center for the people to come to, nor even to carry food but to depend instead on the householders for it. John Dominic Crossan

⁹See Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

has written much on the Kingdom Movement,¹⁰ a movement of empowerment. When he spoke on it at the Pacific School of Religion's Earl Lectures,¹¹ he stressed the necessity of a creative dialectic between the itinerants and the householders. The establishment of God's kingdom on earth required reciprocity between the healing itinerants and the householders who fed them. Likewise today the incarnation of liberal religion in the world requires community ministers and parish ministers in mutual relations that create a reciprocal dialectic. The voices of UU community ministers sound the theme clearly. Here is Jody Shipley, speaking of the ministry of empowerment. Here is Ronald Engel, describing a world full of sacred centers.

The prophetic voices sound a challenge for all groups interested in UU ministry: to build the bridges that bring community and parish ministers together. Fostering informal collegiality in UUMA chapters is a valuable stepping stone. But it is time for more fully orchestrated, intentional plans. What if a group of parish and community ministers went on retreat together to brainstorm and devise a common project? What if continuing education for ministers regularly involved workshops and courses focused on community and parish ministry together? What if the UUA Department of Ministerial Development gave grants for innovative projects involving collaboration between community and parish ministers? What if both Meadville/Lombard and Starr King had regular courses on ministry that brought local community and parish ministers together in conversation with theological students?

Such innovations could go a long way to free us from lingering parish v. non-parish thinking. Another way would be to expand our understanding of "parish." Neil Shadle in his 1994 Reeb Lecture suggested that:

we reappropriate that earlier understanding of the "parish" as the whole community, with the Church as its spiritual center.... When "parish" is understood in this holistic sense, then *priestly* ministry discerns the liturgical character of such community events.... The *teaching* ministry interprets the civic faith we share, helping us understand what it means to be a free people together.... The *pastoral* ministry is offered to every-

¹⁰See especially *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), pp. 225-353.

¹¹"The Mimetic or Itinerant Tradition--From the Historical Jesus to Earliest Christianity," E.T. Earl Lecture, Berkeley, California, January 25, 1995.

one in need.... The *prophetic* ministry works through the various community institutions to call the powers and principalities to accountability.¹²

Neil Shadle's vision is after all very like Jody Shipley's. It requires a "shift in self understanding from the church as private enclave to the church as steward of the public life." Then instead of the church making occasional forays into the community, or allowing its social action committee to drain off energy in such forays, "community ministers and parish ministers would not be polarized but embraced in one inclusive ministry, diverse in forms and unified in purpose." Neil Shadle's words echo the SLM's mission statement in its bylaws: "The Society seeks to implement a vision and recognition of a more inclusive and diverse ministry." And that is what it has done and continues to do, with passion, hard work, and great love.

Barbara Child
February 18, 1995

¹²"Community Ministry and the True Church of Democracy," James Reeb Lecture, Fort Worth, Texas, June 25, 1994.

Appendix

Proclamation

We, as people living in a world that is both dying and seeking to be reborn, who are shaken to our very roots by the massiveness and depth of planetary and human suffering, are empowered by a driving passion to bear witness to that suffering, participate in its transformation, and affirm the inherent glory of life. Therefore, we the undersigned members of the Society for the Larger Ministry, Unitarian Universalist, do covenant together:

- to respond to the cries of pain, to our own brokenness, and to awaken the healing spirit of hope;
- to engage in a broad spectrum of ministries through and with Unitarian Universalist congregations, with the larger community, and increasingly, in a global context;
to celebrate the diversity of life within our elemental interconnectedness;
- to challenge one another as individuals and as members of institutions to identify, analyze, and act upon the basic causes of human hurt and separation.

Thus empowered, we join hands with the community of faith in acknowledging the larger ministry which addresses our common vision. We call upon our denomination to recognize a variety of lay and ordained ministries as embodiments of the Unitarian Universalist principles and purposes. All of our creative ministries -- including academic, administrative, aesthetic, AIDS, campus, camp and conference centers, chaplaincies, community-focused, environmental, gay/lesbian/bisexual, healing, legal, men-focused, music, parish, pastoral, counseling, pastoral psychotherapy, peace, religious education, social justice, women-focused, young adult, and ministries not yet envisioned -- are valid, necessary, and life affirming. Such compassionate, liberating, prophetic ministries are at the very heart of our religious tradition.

Society for the Larger Ministry,
Unitarian Universalist

Chicago, Illinois
November 12, 1988

REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY IN THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DENOMINATION

At the March 1994 consultation on the professional ministry, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, the two representatives of Starr King School for the Ministry volunteered the school to develop a reflection paper on community ministry. We agreed to explore what could constitute a theological grounding for community ministry so that subsequent policies and decisions which may need to be made, as well as problems that might arise (or were already emerging), could be considered in as rich and thoughtful a context as possible. Our group has come to call itself the Starr King Project on Community Ministry.

For the past nine months we have had lengthy conversations, read many books and papers, attended conferences and meetings, and talked informally with others in order to try and understand several things: what is community ministry in our denomination -- now, in the past and what might it be in the future; what does the emergence and acknowledgment of community ministry at this time in our history mean, both in terms of what is going on in the world at large, and what is going on in our congregations and Association; how is community ministry defined, practiced and recognized in other faith traditions; and what are the theological insights and perspectives that inform and inspire our ministry.

Every question we asked and every stone we overturned led to more questions and more resources. We have found these questions to be incredibly complex. We have also found a veritable wealth of resources *already available* -- many wise and articulate women and men have been hard at work, over centuries, and especially in recent times, grappling with what is the right relationship between church and world, ministry and society, congregation and community. There is a great deal of knowledge and guidance to be found in this work, and we UU's will surely benefit from making greater use of it.

This paper attempts to highlight, elaborate and offer my reflections on aspects of our study group's nine month discussion concerning certain questions, themes and tensions.

I. Why This, Why Now?

The emergence of our clergy working in non-parish settings in the community has called attention to the need to "update" our definition and practice of ministry. Our systems were developed with the parish church in mind. Tensions and difficulties have been coming to light that our institutional policies, practices and attitudes have trouble addressing or accommodating, and in some cases, may be causing.

Until the last 40 years in this country there was a relatively seamless flow of ministry going on in the building called church and in the parish which was the geographical base from which a particular church drew its members and in which that church aided those in need, members or not.

Reality has changed dramatically and far more quickly than our "system" of ministry. We have identified these significant changes in both the society in which our congregations live and in the understandings and hopes we hold as members and leaders.

1. There has been a shift away from the original understanding and actuality of "parish" from a geographic area to a building.
2. Perhaps congregational polity has been understood and practiced in too narrow a way, so that the concepts and experience of the "universal church" and our "larger faith" have been lost.
3. We live in a society which is increasingly fragmented and in which there is terrible neglect, cruelty, greed and suffering. Fragmentation in the larger society has brought about the trend towards specialized ministries.
4. Many kinds of charitable activities which were handled by churches for decades became the province of government programs and professionals. Recently there has been a pattern among "ordinary" people in the direction of taking back responsibility and control, which can be seen in education in the form of homeschooling, in social services in the form of self-help groups and 12 step programs, and in churches in the form of lay leadership and ministry.
5. More emphasis is now being placed on systems and relationships, so that connections which we did not understand or chose to ignore have been revealed in undeniable, demanding ways. This is true within individual churches, across the denomination, and between church and society.

6. More emphasis is now being placed on the values of shared leadership and the ministry of all persons, which, among other things, calls attention to the problems inherent in the model of the individualistic church and focus on the church's individual minister.

7. There is an increasing sense of urgency to profess an alternative "saving gospel" for our society that can stand toe to toe with the exclusive, hateful message of some highly visible and well-funded "Christian" organizations.

8. There is a widespread perception that our congregations need to be more diverse in many respects.

9. As theological diversity among our members increases, many of us are involved in spiritual and worship-related experiences which occur outside our UU churches. One effect of this might be a change in what some (many?) people are hoping to accomplish through their church involvement -- that the liberal church is seen as an opportunity to act collectively on our shared values in the larger world; the preferred setting for our spiritual life and practice may be (at least in part) somewhere else.

II. Relationship Of Church and World

"The parish church is the most diverse voluntary association in the U.S. today." --Parker Palmer in "The University, the Church and Urban Society," a monograph, 1981, (p. 10.)

Fifteen years ago Parker Palmer, sociologist, Quaker and author, conducted a study of relationships between specialized ministries connected to mainline Protestant churches (but housed on university campuses or inner city neighborhood centers) and the churches which sponsored them. He explored how effective the ministries in non-parish settings were, how the ministers in the community and in parish settings experienced each other, and to what extent the congregants were interested or involved in non-parish settings.

In his findings he writes that "both campus and urban ministers have failed to cultivate their base of power in the parish...suffer institutional isolation...escape into casework and function in a no-man's land in which the prophet operates beholden to no institution...With this freedom comes loneliness."

According to Palmer, there are certain powers which reside in the parish that argue for the strong relationship between what we would call community ministers and a particular congregation:

1. A church is a mass-based organization
2. A church has the benefit of the gifts of many, particular persons
3. A church can be a visible source of moral outrage and theological judgment
4. A church has the advantage of institutional legitimacy
5. A church has and can raise money.

In order to make wise use of the resources available through a church, community ministers "need to see congregations as constituents and to develop forms of inner mission in order to supplement and support forms of outer mission."

For these reasons, to help assure the effectiveness of community ministers, Palmer recommends stressing the primacy of the parish and as a matter of practicality, he places the responsibility for developing and maintaining strong ties between community and parish church on the community minister.

This conclusion appears to come out of the community organizing model, which would see the savvy community minister as needing to organize the congregation in order to mobilize and use its superior resources to meet his or her own agenda of serving the poor, or students, or some other identified group with needs. The congregants, when defined as constituents, become something to be manipulated, even if the goal is service. This is a far cry from seeing the community minister as a vital participant in the congregation's understanding of its larger ministry.

This model can all too easily lead to: fear that community ministers are trying to take advantage of congregations by drawing away their members' volunteer time or dollars and that community ministry, when viewed as a "thing" is just one more chore being laid on congregations and "their" ministers to deal with. And when the onus of recruiting support, involvement and resources from the congregation falls on a community minister's individual shoulders, this model can all too easily lead to exhaustion, frustration and isolation.

Instead we need to "develop and refresh a theology of social engagement, and polity and practice that support it," according to Rebecca Parker. Among other things, this asks us to view community, church and ministry through a different lens than the organizing model that has become one of our

major ways of understanding ourselves in the world and how social change should occur.

III. The Universal Church

150 years ago William Ellery Channing, in his sermon "The Church" took care to point out that The Church is much larger and more inclusive than any individual church, denomination or all of these put together. And this universal church of which he speaks is no abstraction -- it is real and dynamic and cannot be captured or confined by any structures or rules we design.

Even "within" our own denomination it is reported that there are 400,000 persons in this country who identify themselves as Unitarian Universalists, while just over 100,00 of us belong to a particular congregation. What is this "larger faith" that these other 300,000 people feel connected to that doesn't include membership in a UU church?

At the end of his sermon Channing concludes his consideration of The Church by describing the underlying unity among religious people of all persuasions:

"There is, too, a common ground of practice, aloof from all controversy, on which we may all meet. We may all unite hearts and hands in doing good, in fulfilling God's purposes of love towards our race, in toiling and suffering for the cause of humanity, in spreading intelligence, freedom, and virtue, in making God known for the reverence, love, and imitation of (God's) creatures, in resisting the abuses and corruptions of past ages, in exploring and drying up the sources of poverty, in rescuing the fallen from intemperance, in succoring the orphan and widow, in enlightening and elevating the depressed portions of the community, in breaking the yoke of the oppressed and enslaved, in exposing and withstanding the spirit and horrors of war, in sending God's word to the ends of the earth, in redeeming the world from sin and woe. The angels and pure spirits who visit our earth come not to join a sect, but to do good to all. May this universal charity descend on us, and possess our hearts! may our narrowness, exclusiveness, and bigotry melt way under this mild, celestial fire! Thus we shall not only join ourselves to Christ's universal church on earth, but to the invisible, to the innumerable company of the just made perfect, in the mansions of everlasting purity and peace."

The emergence of community ministry as a denominational reality gives us the opportunity to remember what The Church really is and what our most important concerns must be.

In the denominational structure of the Disciples of Christ, it is understood that "While a minister may serve a local congregation, their ordination is to the ministry of the church universal."

IV. Ministry Is Ministry. Or Is It?

When exploring the issues surrounding community ministry, a question that often arises is: What is a ministry and what is a job? Who decides what setting and kind of work is to be done by a community minister?

Ideally the discernment of where and how to minister is made by a minister in the context of a community. In their book The Emerging Laity: Returning Leadership to the Community of Faith, authors James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead state:

"Conscience is that personal authority which is the inner guide of religious life and vocation. While conscience is personal, it not a private authority...This inner authority is rooted in communal life. Conscience is shaped and seasoned in a community of believers...It is only in such a social milieu (especially in the family and school and parish) that we learn the shape of this inner authority. And it is in these social settings that, over many seasons, our inner authority is tested, purified, refined. Gradually, conscience becomes a reliable resource; it becomes one of the trustworthy voices (along with the other voices of the Spirit) that guide the complex decisions in which our careers and vocations unfold. This inner authority, developed in community, continues to bind us to one another in our witness of faith. A mature conscience leads not to private compromise or convenience but to mutual accountability and communal discernment." (p. 7)

Clearly we need to move beyond the community organizing paradigm of a parish community's relationship to a community minister. The community minister is not to be used as a mere vehicle for accomplishing certain purposes by a congregation any more than a congregation should be used by a community minister (as may result from this somewhat mechanistic, utilitarian view). Much would be gained by everyone concerned if a community minister were a member of a UU congregation

and the potential for "mutual accountability and communal discernment" this could facilitate.

Why do we call this sort of ministry "community" ministry and not "specialized" ministry? By opening up more options than Parish Ministry, Ministry of Religious Education and Community Ministry, wouldn't our ministry ultimately become less rather more fragmented?

There are all kinds of specialized ministries; these are a few examples:

1- Chaplaincy/ pastoral counseling, which in non-parish settings have their own systems and want people credentialed and ordained by the minister's denomination

2- UU camps, organizations, UUA positions

3- Activist ministries

4- Theological education

5- Spiritual direction

6- Community agencies

All of these specialized ministries, when they occur outside the parish church, could therefore be said to be happening in the community, but "community ministry" doesn't seem to be a very satisfactory, unifying label. Instead, these are actually different kinds of ministries, and they may or may not define someone's basic, enduring vocation.

V. What Is Needed?

Community ministers in our denomination have been asking to be welcomed and included. Why do they need to ask, and what exactly are they asking for?

Community ministers have reported that sometimes (often?) parish ministers don't accept them fully as colleagues, don't understand or are not interested in their work or how to collaborate; even react as though the concept and practice of community ministry are a threat to or a drain on "their" congregation.

It wasn't our purpose in this project to sort out all of tensions and concerns expressed by ministers and other leaders, although we heard and read about many difficult dynamics and situations. We speculated quite a bit about where, how and why these tensions and obstacles occur. But our larger purpose was to gain greater understanding of the

ways in which our current conceptions, structures and attitudes about community, church and ministry lead towards realizing our vision, growth and health, and the ways in which they lead towards fragmentation, stress and depletion.

What we hear community ministers asking for (different people want different things and use differing language -- we don't see the words listed here as interchangeable or all-inclusive): legitimacy, validation, respect, support, status, credibility, attention, relationship, recognition, and visibility.

This can be quite a delicate matter. On the one hand, it doesn't seem appropriate for people to use churches and the process of ordination in order to meet a personal, understandable desire for status or legitimacy. No one owns a ministry, by definition, and the church doesn't owe someone a ministry, however worthwhile their work may be, because, again, by definition, a ministry isn't a thing, or a reward. It's a description of a network of relationships.

On the other hand, when community ministers -- when any of our ministers, leaders or members -- are asking us as Unitarian Universalists to join them in caring for the larger community and in speaking up for justice, or, at a minimum, in enabling them to represent us in doing this work when we are not able to participate directly, then their need for greater visibility, credibility and relationship is all too apparent.

VI. Reframing The Conversation

"We have not yet imagined the ways in which the incorporation of community ministry into our Association will strengthen the quality of ministry we offer in all its forms." --Flo Gelo, in "Settlement for Community Ministers," (p.50)

These are the questions we encourage congregations and others to address in their conversations as they grapple with the meanings and possibilities contained in this issue:

How can community ministers strengthen our churches?

How can community ministers strengthen our ministry?

How can community ministers strengthen our movement/saving gospel/mission/cause?

We not only need to ask and attempt to answer for our situation and time, what is the church, but also, what is the community? And: how can the community minister to us?

We have often wondered out loud, how much of this dilemma has to do with resources? If we felt we had unlimited resources, wouldn't we call ministers to all manner of good works? Currently we are faced with beleaguered congregations, beleaguered ministers and a very beleaguered society. How can we approach this from the vantage point of abundance, without sounding like a commercial for EST?

VII. Getting Unstuck: Untracking Our Ministry

"It is possible to be committed to institutions. We need to make every effort to give the Spirit pre-eminence -- that which comes from us -- and not let principalities and powers have too much control." (Rebecca Parker)

Currently the fellowshiping process divides clergy into three categories. What are the benefits, what is the damage? We urge all of us to examine the effects of tracking on recruiting, theological education, internships, fellowshiping, settlement, a minister's worklife over a lifetime and a church's life over decades and centuries. How might our ministry be strengthened by removing the tracks? Can we look at this with fresh eyes and not be derailed by the various obstacles which are sure to come to light?

It might serve everyone very well if we had systems which *facilitate* our clergy in serving in a variety of settings, over time, depending on the needs of our congregations, communities and the ministers themselves. In fact this "sequencing" already takes place, and at least tracks have been eliminated once someone is fellowshiped.

Accountability: If we clarified/broadened our understanding of the universal church, why couldn't certain ministers be formally related to the Church of the Larger Fellowship, districts, the Benevolent Fraternity, UUSC, UUWF, etc., instead of a congregation, for certain periods of time in their worklife?

Availability of wonderful ministers for our congregations: Plans for recruiting efforts for additional ministry candidates are underway. In the most recent issue of ISSUE ZERO there was a very insightful article asking: who are we looking for; who seems to be missing *in addition to* people of color, since we already have more candidates than churches? Instead of spending a lot of money recruiting, what about putting energy into maintaining candidates and ministers? Do we know how many of the people who enter our seminaries drop out and why? How many who graduate do not

seek fellowship and why? How many who are fellowshipped and ordained are settled? How many who are settled stay in the parish ministry, and for what period of time? How many ministers leave the parish, and how many could or do return? How and why do our ministers change the nature of their work setting, and how often? At every point in the process, how can we keep the good people we've already got?

VIII. Kick Out the Jams: The Ministry of All Souls

What about members of congregations who are doing good works -- what is the difference between their ministries and those of ordained community ministers? This question is raised not to thwart the progress of community ministers in our denomination, but rather to call attention to the larger struggle we are all going through in reframing ministry, leadership, authority, and roles. This struggle is going on within churches just as much as it is going on between congregation and community.

In their book The Emerging Laity the Whiteheads have a great deal to offer in reconceiving right relationship between clergy and laity:

"We can allow the promise of mutuality to dissolve ungraceful divisions between clergy and lay, and between men and women...

"Christians are recalling ancient, alternative images of how to be together and how practically to express their faith...we are coming to reunderstand ministry as ...the service of a priest or other professional Minister; equally it may be the service given in one's career or civic community or family...This imaginative broadening of service challenges two earlier attitudes about ministry: the notion that ministry was an elite calling reserved to those with a special vocation; and that ministry was exercised exclusively in the church, as a sacred realm, rather than in the activities of the "secular' world..."

"Everyone has a vocation that includes a witness to Christian values and service to others. The long-standing but ultimately unchristian distinction of sacred and profane now serves less to focus our attention on God (its original intent) and more to restrict God's presence. God's presence in the church...ought not to suggest an absence or deprivation of God beyond these locales.

"By purifying the established patterns - the ways we have imagined and defined God's power among us - we begin to picture ministry in broader, more inclusive ways...ministry is a shared imperative. As the common responsibility of a faith community, ministry becomes a more mutual enterprise.

The differences among us in ministerial callings rise not from the presence or absence of a 'real' vocation but from the special gifts found among us.

"We are not all called to the same ministry: pastoral ministry in a suburban church differs from the calling to witness to one's faith through civil disobedience to protest social injustice. A ministry of caring for the terminally ill differs from that of teaching grammar to school children. But these differences which suggest both the shape of a vocation and the mode of our service, are more related to gifts than to lifestyle. These differences indicate a variety of function rather than excellence; in a less hierarchical church, ministry is portrayed more as mutual service and less as a status occupation...

"Once the special pattern of power that we call ministry is broken out of a hierarchical world view, we recognize another feature of service. Ministry is not meant to be delivered to a passive and docile community of believers. Ministry arises from within the community itself. Each faith community is recognized as a source of ministry, not just its recipient...Distinctions that protect status and privilege even while they separate different tasks in the community become less convincing. In all of this official ministry and leadership are being led out of exile, back into the community of faith." (pp. 158-160)

IX. Models of Leadership and Our Future Ministry

Just as there are all kinds of specialized ministries among ordained clergy, there are all kinds of arrangements between community ministers, congregations and other UU organizations. We need to learn as much as we can about what is working. We also need to remember that each situation is unique and that that is a blessing, rather than a complication. It is too soon to reduce our experience to, say, three choices of "how to do it right" and ask everyone to fit into one these boxes.

Instead, we have the opportunity to talk with each other, give our imaginations free reign and let a thousand flowers bloom. What could be worked out in one place for a while that would strengthen your congregation, your ministry and your community? Without compromising communication and accountability (in all directions), what is the simplest, least policy and rule-driven arrangement that can be developed?

Perhaps most important is to ask: How can the community minister to us? We hope a great many conversations will take place, leading to a renewal of the flow of love and service out through the doors and windows of the church into the

community and back the other way. As ethicist Sharon Welch writes in A Feminist Ethic of Risk, "Without the joy and support that come from acknowledging the mutuality of responsibility, being loved as well as loving, the will for fundamental change cannot be sustained. People are empowered to work for justice by their love for others and by the love they receive from others." (p. 163)

As my hospital chaplaincy supervisor was fond of saying, "We're all in this gorpy mess together." Another way to describe the universal church?

Mary J. Harrington
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