

**BLESSINGS OF MINISTRY**  
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**Reflection on the Present (and how I got here)**

I am both deeply honoured by, and not a little uncomfortable with, today's celebration. And I'm very grateful to Jovanna and Marion and Paula and and and...all of you for choosing to mark this time in the life of this congregation, and for our joint recognition of Anne's presence with us. It is a testament to your commitment to our shared history, our shared ministry and our shared lives.

About twenty years ago, I was deeply unsettled in my life. I had a beautiful home, a cottage, a huge network of friends, lucrative work...and I felt purposeless. I had a few years earlier begun to delve into varieties of spiritual exploration (tho resisted religious community) and still was feeling stuck and empty. One day I came across a passage by Thoreau...I distinctly remember the moment I read it. And re-read it. And read it again.

It is this: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life...nor did I wish to practice resignation...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...to put to rout all that was not life..."

His powerful words were the catalyst I needed. I began to meet with a career counselor who quickly perceived me to be ready to take a leap because I was too uncomfortable with what was to stay put any longer. My work with her unearthed what seemed a huge improbability... and an extremely frightening one...that I might find a new career in the field of religion or spirituality. And off I went into unknown woods.

I discovered that whatever my work, it would have to be in the context of community. For it is in community...deliberately created and maintained...that we find our connections, our meaning, our purpose. It is in such community, difficult though it sometimes is, that we know and are known, where we are encouraged to learn and grow, where we can explore difference and be changed by it.

I say community deliberately created because while it is possible to find community in a workplace or neighbourhood or affinity group, these generally are not founded on the purpose of challenging us to live as our best selves in relationship with others and with the earth. And I say community intentionally maintained because this kind of community requires our commitment and our resilience.

This is such a place...a community where our hearts can be moved. Toward more love...more peace...more justice...more joy. That's our shared ministry...to be that community of love where lives are changed. We've challenged ourselves in our purpose statement...to be welcoming, to embrace life with wonder, to ask questions, to live our principles, to act for justice, and to be personally transformed.

You are the woods into which I've traveled in order to confront life and to live it as deeply as possible. I have been transformed in my ministry with you, yet, borrowing a line from Stanley Kunitz, I know that I am not done with my changes. It is my daily intention that together we create, and maintain, a community where you...where each person...can be transformed by love.

## Reflection on the Future

It's been eleven years since this congregation voted to call me as your first full-time settled minister. Eleven years. Some might wonder why we didn't celebrate at year ten, but numerologists say that 11 is associated with faith and spiritual awakening, and that eleven represents dynamic capability in visioning and attaining goals. It's associated with justice and inspiration and purpose. So, it seems that celebrating 11 is exactly the right thing to do.

I said in my annual report, both written and verbal, that I've been walking with this question: What is it that we can do now that our eleven years together makes possible?

For example, you now know me well enough to know that I like taking leaps. Arthur, as co-chair of the search committee, will tell of how I took some time in answering your call. I remember telling him then that I saw myself poised, ready to jump from an airplane, but that I just needed a little more time to pry my fingers loose from the door. It wasn't that I didn't want to jump, but...I was alone, and it was a jump into a huge unknown.

Today, I can easily see myself at the threshold of an airplane's door again, ready to leap, but this time I'm not alone. I now trust in this faith to hold my hand. I also now know that when I stretch out my hand, you're there. That makes everything easier, everything possible.

And here's another picture...that of someone in a pool encouraging a child to jump into their arms. "Come on, you can do it!" When the child finally takes the leap, it is exhilarating...and possible only because of complete trust that they will be caught and held. And this is the relationship we have now; sometimes I'm in the pool ready to catch you, and sometimes you're ready to catch me. We trust one another. And that makes it possible for us to leap...into possibility, into change, into the unknown.

In the end, this is YOUR ministry, your congregation. It is ultimately your vision that I serve. While I'm not preparing to leave as Anne is, one day I will. And another minister will come, and you will love them, and mold them, and change them, just as you have done with me. But before that time comes, we have more to do together...more pools to leap into...more woods to explore.

During our installation service ten years ago, I spoke these words, and I repeat them here today:

"I will strive to minister to the full diversity of this community, to families of every form, and to people of every generation, all the while encouraging you to take initiative and to cultivate loving relationships with one another. I pledge to seek and honour the holiness in the midst of all life, to wrestle with ambiguities in an effort to discern the truth, to bear witness to the brokenness present in human experience, and to offer my authentic self in the service of transformation and healing. My commitment to this ministry cannot be contained in words alone; I hereby commit to [continue] living it in my heart and with my deeds."

And you promised the cooperation of your hands, minds and hearts, as well as your good will. You said you would be engaged and would walk with me in understanding, compassion, and truth, so that we could do the work of justice in our congregation, our community, and in the world.

What are your commitments today? What is it that you plan to do with this one wild and precious community?

Let us leap toward fulfilling the vision that has drawn us together, and which holds us together.