



October 17, 2021

Dear First Parish Members and Friends,

When the email went out last Sunday about my leave, I held my breath. I was unsure how you all would react. I am deeply touched by your support. The calls and emails wishing me well, thanking me for my leadership, and supporting me in taking some much-needed time off, have filled my cup.

For those that were not in the service you can listen to my sermon www.uukennebunk.org/sermon/rest-story. This will give you additional details, but the short and sweet of it is that in the past two weeks I have become acutely aware of my level of exhaustion. The magnitude of all that I, that we, have been carrying for the past 19 months has caught up with me.

The Committee on Ministry and I hatched a plan and presented it to the Board of Directors. Knowing that we are facing a budget shortfall I offered to take a one-month furlough - four weeks of unpaid time off. This, in addition to the 2 weeks of unused vacation from last year and a week of study time to attend a course that I had previously planned to attend, would give me 7 weeks of leave, with six of them for rest. The Board agreed. And while I know they are nervous about the prospect of me being gone for 7 weeks, they recognized that for the health of the church, and for my health, it had to happen.

I have learned, since speaking my truth out loud, that I am not alone in this. Numerous colleagues, both UU and from other faiths traditions, are quickly reaching breaking points of their own. So many of us jumped into action when the lock down began. Often putting the needs of our congregation ahead of ourselves. For the past 19 months, we have been caring for our congregants, learning new technology, reformatting worship, and church life not just, once but over and over, all while holding the collective grief of the world.

So, what will I do with my time off? Tomorrow morning, I report to the Maine Criminal Justice Academy for the law enforcement chaplain training. Now, I realize that this is work, but I had already committed to attend this training in August and so this will be my week of study leave. It is something that I have wanted to do since I started as a chaplain with the Kennebunk Police Department 3 ½ years ago. In mid-November I will be attending a 5-day retreat at the Genesis Center in Western Mass. This is a silent directed retreat that is designed to provide time and space for prayer and solitude.

I have been actively, with regular reminding from my spouse, fighting the urge to fill up my time off, or to use this time to get done all the things that I have wanted to do. More than

anything I want to slow down, to do nothing, to rest. To let the spirit move me towards what nourishes my soul.

UU minister Frank Clarkson says, “when we have the courage to rest, and for some of us, it will take some courage to rest and do nothing for a change, then we start to see what at least some people have always known: that under the surface, there is a silent and invisible life. That we are made to be in touch with this Mystery, to rest assured that beneath the work and the struggle of this life, there is more going on, and we miss it if we only live on the busy surface of things.”¹

The Board has assembled an amazing Leave Task Force that will have oversight on all things church-related while I am gone. The Worship Committee and I have planned some wonderful services. You will get to hear from colleagues that I deeply respect. And the quest for new staff will continue. Members of the respective search teams will continue to review resumes and schedule interviews. They will contact me when they have a candidate.

I invite you to join me in the spiritual discipline of resting. I encourage you to make some time to do nothing. And when I return, our individual and collective visions will be clearer. Then, we can begin to discern who, as a congregation, we want to be, where we want to go, and how we will get there.

Thank you and I love you.

In Faith and Love,



Rev. Lara K-J Campbell

¹ Frank Clarkson, The Promise of Rest. UU Church of Haverhill. July 1, 2018
<https://www.uuhaverhill.org/sermons/2018/7/3/the-promise-of-rest>