

Saying Goodbye to Make Room for a New Hello

A Sermon Delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth on
April 15, 2018 by Rev. Sara Hayman

There's a story that been living with me as I've prepared for this Sunday.
It's a story about a little boy living in a village.
Every day he goes out into the woods and forest.
His parents worry about him – there's danger out there,
thieves, possibly; something could happen?
“Why do you go?” his father asked. “To find God.”
“Don't you know God is everywhere the same – here, in you, in me,
in the temple and at home; you don't have to go to the woods
to find God. God is everywhere the same.” “Yes, father,
I know that, but I am not everywhere the same.”

Very soon, it will be my time to go to the woods, so to speak!
What a gift you are giving me in letting me go and take sabbatical;
What a journey it will be to bring myself—to walk myself—
into new experience of time and places and landscapes and
relationships that will help me to find (and feel and be
nurtured more readily by) the presence of God,
by the Spirit of Life within me, by the Holy Spirit
we each wish to serve and bring more and more to life
as we understand it.

I am the luckiest minister I know at the moment!

In a sermon she titles, “Not Your Grandmother's Sabbath,”
UU minister Ana Levy-Lyons says this about the importance of
taking and making “Sabbath time” in our lives: A brief aside, it's been
interesting to learn that that word sabbatical comes from the
word Sabbath, which in Hebrew is related to the word shabbat,
meaning “to cease, desist, or rest.” Ana writes, “...our world desperately

needs a “pause” button. And not just any pause button, but a spiritually charged, heart-opening space that’s set apart from our regular lives. We need sacred time. We need time outside of the cycle of work and consumerism. We need unplugged time. We need time alone and we need time together. We need time to dream and think and pray and meditate. We need time to play. We need time in nature – to sit under a tree, to climb a mountain, to take a long walk...”

Going on Sabbatical, being on Sabbatical will help make this possible for me...I’m more grateful than I can say... grateful, too, to be leaving you for a short time – 6 months will go by quickly, I’m sure— knowing, seeing and feeling that we are in a good, healthy place together as minister and congregation right now.

For these past seven years, we have been working hard at walking faithfully together—what a blessing it is to know that’s true!

We’ve have shown up for one another to companion each other through times of difficult tender losses, and we’ve dedicated ourselves to the children we love who are growing up among us. We have celebrated your marriages and tried to be there for you as relationships have changed and health and well-being have been challenged...

You are a loving community that knows how to weave people into the fold and really mean it, really include them and I love that about you!

Together, these many years, we’ve taken actions to care for our building, this beautiful place where we gather— we’ve paved the parking lot, and installed a state of art fire safety system; we’ve renovated the Community Room and put down new carpeting; did you see the new stoves in the kitchen? And we’re using technology in worship... who’d ever have guessed we’d get here?!

Together, we’ve been building systems to strengthen our church and how we work—we now have a PM&M Committee,

and Fiscal Matters Committee; we have a SGM Coordinator. Our Safety Committee has come back to life and is working on big, timely dreams and plans. We have equipped more people to be Pastoral Visitors and as such to be ready and willing to visit and be there for others, particularly when things are hard.

I'm still excited that we have a Mission Statement, one infused with the genius and ethos of this vibrant community—I feel your presence in it—"Celebrating the sacred, we gather in loving community to nourish souls and live justice into the world."

In January of 2011, we were 87 adult members of this congregation. Today, there are 127 adult members!

We have had two incredible Ministerial Interns, Lane and now Amy. Very soon Amy will be with us as Student Sabbatical Minister.

And we have a Congregational Covenant—words we're agreed upon (thank you, Margaret Thurston!) that call us to the disciplined and faithful practice of purposefully walking together in the spirit of love and trust and kindness, and to come back from conflict when it arises, and to nurture health in ourselves, in our relating to each other, in our shared congregational life.

We have 28 solar panels on our sanctuary roof, and new members among ready and willing to revive a Green Team—people who will help us walk the walk of more sustainable living and help us care for the earth which is our home.

I don't have to tell you that we now know how to make egg rolls, and we pull off miracle Service Auctions, and more and more we believe together in our ability (our agency and strength) to try and do just about anything we dream up and set our mind to.

YES, we have been working hard together, walking faithfully together, learning side by side, growing together, bringing our mission and ministries more and more to life—not just to benefit our selves or meet our own needs alone, but to be able to reach out, and to sincerely welcome others in; to be able to affirm and celebrate the dignity of every person and being—I think of the high school kids of the GSDA at Ellsworth

who get your cookies and a loving note each week;
I think of the work our Welcoming Congregation
Renewal Taskforce...how they're calling us to see & celebrate
and stand up for the rights and dignity of transgender people...
I think of our Mid Maine YoUUtH Service and Learning Projects,
the pilgrimages we've taken together that our youth might
see and experience more of the world around them
and be called more deeply to loving and serving others...

We have been working hard together...
And we are in a good place, a strong, healthy
and vital place, and that is all the more reason
why it is right and good to begin our Sabbatical
Journey together now...

Bill Clark, long time member and chair of our Sabbatical
Committee, is the one who said it months ago, maybe even
a year ago: In taking Our Sabbatical, we the one things we cannot expect
to happen is that we will stay still or be unchanged...that's not the way life
works.

It will be impossible to be exactly the same or exactly where we are
Now, as good and hopeful as that is, when come back together.
We will change, and grow, and remember again,
I hope and trust, the strength and beauty of our separate
selves as minister and congregation, two entities who love and walk together,
and who each have their own ministries to grow and share.

While I'm on sabbatical, I pledge to you, with joy
and a deep breath and a keen knowing that it's right,
I pledge to you that I will be doing my work.
I will be letting go of you...knowing in my heart of hearts,
that you are and you will be so fine;
that without me, you'll have a chance to come to life in
ways I haven't yet imagined because you'll be needing
and caring for each other, and for our church community;
needing and caring for all who arrive with more
of a sense of ownership, agency and space to do it.

Doing my work on sabbatical will not look like being busy
all the time; writing emails and going to meetings and being

in the usual grind of things. Doing my work on sabbatical will mean living my life in a ways that will help me to rest and grow, to refill my reserve and attend to my health and my relationship, while being disciplined about showing up to each day and being grateful for the gift it is. My Sabbatical journey will be about making time to write, and pray, and listen, and put myself in the way of beauty that I might find and feel more rooted in and nourished by the presence of God, that I might come back to you, my beloved people, with new imagination and clarity about how to be your minister; about how better to partner with you in more helpful ways; about how to continue growing and throwing roots down with you, that will support and sustain this congregation and our shared ministry together hopefully for years and years to come.

Before I became a parish minister serving in this congregation, I was a hospice chaplain. In that ministry, I learned the importance of acknowledging beginnings and endings and the truth of our finite-time together. You may have heard me say, please do not die while I'm gone and that request still holds, AND we know life will happen as it will happen.

So as we prepare in ourselves to let go of each other, that we might come back and enter into a new part of our journey together, I want also to say these five things... I love you. That's just true. I thank you...for being my people. I forgive you and ask that you forgive me for all the times and ways I've let you down. In this moment, though it's hard to do, I say goodbye...what a gift you are in my life... and what a way we are making...

Buen Camino, my beloveds.
God speed, too.
Amen and Blessed Be...