

“In the Interim: Rest, reframe, and renew, for the only constant is change”

Interim Minister the Rev. Fran Dearman

September 11th, 2016 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Hallo. Here we are. I am the Reverend Fran Dearman, and I am pleased and excited that you have invited me to serve as your Interim Minister here at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda. I thank you for your warm welcome. I thank you for your hospitality. And I thank you for your help in finding my way around and getting settled in.

I join an awesome company. Many years of lay and clergy leadership have inspired the Universalist and Unitarian traditions here in Olinda. It is my privilege, my honour, and my joy that you have invited me here during this time of transition.

There have been many pastors and preachers here before me, and there will be many who follow. With any luck at all, and with thanks for the skill, courage, and commitment of whomever you will in due course name to your Ministerial Search Committee, in two years time you will be welcoming your next settled minister.

And my part in this time of transition is to walk with you, help out as appropriate, and then—leave. So this is hallo, but also good-bye. I shall be with you for the next year—or perhaps two years—and then I shall return to my family in Victoria. And you will say goodbye to me and you will welcome a settled minister.

May this congregation and her people continue to nurture body, mind, and spirit, and be a blessing to the Essex County and environs. May our meeting be like the leafy branches of some great tree, where life connects to life, sending forth the fruit of our best resolves.

Let me connect a little, in this first sermon. By way of introduction, permit me to share a little of who I am, where I come from, and where I’m going. My name is Frances Dearman—Fran, named for my father, and a dear man he was. My permanent residence is in Victoria, British Columbia, where I share our family home with my mother, Suzanne Dearman, and the occasional cat.

I was born and raised on Vancouver Island, the first of my immediate family to be born Canadian. My early years were spent in a small house that my parents built with their own hands, somewhere along the old road between Duncan and Lake Cowichan. The nearest signpost said, “Slippery When Wet”. There were tall trees, tall ferns, a lush greenness all around, and misty mornings. It was like growing up in a painting by Emily Carr, deep and rich and mysterious.

My parents were English. They emigrated to Canada after the second world war. I was born to folks who had known war close up. From this we learned an ethic of hospitality, that all things are connected, and we’re all in this together.

In the 1950's my parents took their children to Unitarian Sunday School in Victoria. The choice they made that day has given me a better life: a faith of freedom, reason, and tolerance, reverence, and generosity, a faith hopeful for peace and justice and loving-kindness. I like to think of myself as a founding toddler of the First Unitarian Church of Victoria.

The Victoria church called our first settled minister in the 1960's. The Rev. Marvin Evans was a tall gangly Virginian, trained at Meadville-Lombard in Chicago. I was much impressed by Marvin. He liked to sail. He liked to drink coffee and chat. You could talk to him. And he got to give sermons on neat stuff like the philosopher Martin Buber and the I-thou relationship.

Marvin was very real to me, and I could see right off that ministry could be a good thing. But it took me many more years to grow into the person I wanted to become, before I would be a minister, and learn to do ministry. So I completed a Bachelor of Arts in Economics at the University of Victoria. Then I ran away to sea.

Georgian College, in Owen Sound, Ontario, had a co-op program for ships officers. My first year as officer cadet, I sailed in the M/V Imperial Bedford, out of the Dartmouth refinery. That summer we did two trips up to Resolute Bay in the Arctic Islands, north of the Arctic Circle, furthest north I've ever been.

After that, I sailed mostly in Great Lakes freighters. We moved a lot of prairie harvest out of the grain elevators at the Lakehead. We carried grain in bulk, across the Great Lakes and down the Seaway to the elevators in Montreal, and further on down the St. Lawrence River towards the salt water. One trip we took a million bushels of oats into the Georgian Bay, to railhead, for transhipment to Peterborough, where they make your breakfast cereal. One million bushels.

I served ten years in merchant ships. Sailing surely taught me that everything is connected. After ten years steam-boating I retired from merchant shipping and returned home to Victoria. Thereafter I spent more time with the Naval Reserve, mostly on training cruises in the Gulf Islands, on the west coast. The navy gave me a crew of twenty persons, and a seventy-five ton vessel and sent us out to get close to the water. What a great job! The navy taught me to keep warm and dry and keep a steady course in rough seas.

For many years I spent summers on the water. In fall and spring—we don't have winter semesters in Victoria—in fall and spring I attended the University of Victoria. Eventually I graduated with a Masters Degree in Classics. I loved Classics. I got to read Latin and Greek, and history and art and archaeology. After graduation, in 1995, I went to Jordan for a while, to do archaeological survey and excavation, and a little travelling in the Middle East. I remember Syria. Aleppo, Palmyra. Jordan, Jerusalem, Israel. Beautiful country. I remember.

Finally I felt ready to become a minister, the kind of minister I wanted to be. At age forty-seven I entered the Vancouver School of Theology, where they let me read Hebrew. I graduated with a Masters in Divinity. My training for ministry also included a summer as chaplaincy intern at

Vancouver General Hospital, and a year of ministerial internship in the parish, under the wing of the Rev. Brian Kiely in Edmonton.

Fourteen years ago I was ordained by my home congregation at First Victoria. I then accepted a call as settled minister in Anchorage, Alaska, where I served five years. Last year I served in North Shore Vancouver as Interim Minister, and before that Halifax and Mississauga, and before that Calgary, and before that in Winnipeg. And now here I am in Olinda, as your Interim Minister.

In two years time, you will very likely welcome a new settled minister here.

And where will I go then? I'll go to my home, to Victoria, British Columbia. My roots are deep there. Things change, over time. Times change. We change. I loved my settlement in Alaska, but I had to leave. My white card ran out before my green card came in. And my father died, about ten years ago, so I feel a need to be closer to home now. I loved settled ministry, but interim ministry is a better fit for me now. Being an interim minister means I have the summer to be home with my mother and go sailing.

This will be my sixth interim ministry. To prepare for this role, I attended an interim ministry orientation course at Boston in July of 2008. The folks leading that initial orientation were very clear about boundaries and limits; my effectiveness as an interim minister depends upon my close observation of those limits. And the UU transitional ministers and colleagues I meet with annually at the April Interim Gathering in Texas are dead set on it, too.

While I was at Mississauga I complete the follow-up training for intentional transitional ministry with the Interim Ministry Network. I am now a fully accredited interim minister, with a framed certificate on the wall to remind me of the responsibilities thereof.

Accordingly, I make three promises. Three promises.

First, I promise to leave. I will not seek settlement here. Hallo and good-bye. I am here with you for one year, two at most, and then I will go home to Victoria, to my mother, my garden, and my sailboat.

Second – you are lovable people, and a person might easily learn to love Olinda and want to stay forever. But I will not linger on. I will leave when the time comes due.

Third and last, I promise to respect and support your search process. Specifically, I promise never to make any comment on any potential candidate. It's a small world, the Unitarian Universalist ministry. We ministers tend to know, or know of, each other. I will make no comment on any potential candidate. No comment on any candidate. No comment on any of my brothers and sisters in the UU ministry who might aspire to serve this congregation as settled minister. And may all good fortune attend your search team and your search process.

Part of that search process is for this congregation to do some deep thinking about who you are, where you come from, and where you are going. This is an historic church. It is also a living church. What is the 'burning coal' that draws and holds you here? You need to know who you are, and where you want to go, before you can know which minister might offer the best fit and help you get there. You need to do some deep thinking about leadership, and how you wish to participate in your religious community. You need to be mindful of how you relate to the denomination, and how that great circle of experience and expertise might be of assistance and inspiration.

There's more. You need to take a deep breath, and let it go, and just relax a little. Transitions are challenging. Loosen up a little. Relax. I know you folks are busy beavers and you are capable of working very hard—your building and your programmes attest to that. There will be lots to work at during the next two years. I would urge you also to work at taking good care of yourselves and each other, setting your priorities, maybe even letting go of one or two things that might be nice to do, but just too much for just now. Especially with the flus and colds, that lurk in the winter's chill, waiting to swoop down upon us. The folks who study influenzas say we can try to stay well by taking good care of ourselves through the winter, eating well, getting some exercise, and getting enough sleep.

So from time to time, please, remember to just relax a little. Two years will go by fast enough. There will be lots of time for worrying. I would urge you to relax while you can; whenever the opportunity arises. I shall be trying to do the same. So if you catch me taking a nap, I'm actually modelling non-anxious presence. Non-anxious presence.

Meanwhile, here we are, together, a limited engagement, one year, perhaps two. We're taking a big risk, you know. We might get to know each other. We might like each other. We might learn to care for one another, knowing that at the close of our time together we must let each other go.

Letting go will be difficult. But letting go makes room for new life.

A few years ago I was on sabbatical in northern Spain, long distance walking along the old Camino pilgrim trail to Santiago de Compostella. Walking six hundred kilometers to Santiago surely taught me that a light pack makes a happy pilgrim. And a light pack means letting go.

May your pack be light and your step be glad, this day, and every day, throughout this coming time of transition.

Hallo, good-bye, and how lovely to be here with you this interim time of transition, of rest, renewal, and change.

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