

Donna's Ordination: Charge to the Congregation

Donna came into my life when Rev. Tino, who is my minister, brought her to us as the Director of Religious Education. She promptly changed her title to Director of Religious Exploration, and what children went to while their parents were at service was Way Cool Sunday School. It was clear to some of us that she was a minister even then, just without the "shingle." I'm not sure she dared to see herself as Reverend Renfro back then, but let's just say that when she told us that she had decided to attend seminary, I was among those whose reaction was: duh!

Actually I don't mean to make light of what is a huge decision in anyone's life. For Donna it meant years of financial and, in a way, emotional insecurity as she went up against the costs and the rigors of ministerial preparation. But she was called, and answer she did- and here we are. Because I so respect what she went through to get here, I cannot say how much it means to me to be able to reflect with you about the relationship I hope you will build with your new minister.

Anyone who has known Donna for more than a week knows that dancing is a huge part of her life. It's an entirely appropriate metaphor for a loving relationship between Reverend Renfro (I just LOVE saying that) and a congregation. When she first came to you, perhaps you mostly watched as she pirouetted through her first weeks among you. It's easy to do, to be transfixed by her energy and that dazzling smile that just casts warmth over everything and everyone. Part of dancing is self-expression, and there is an aspect of that in ministry too, isn't there? Donna has a great deal to say, and she will bring her own style to the pulpit. But she is not just a performer; you will see other aspects of her personality in small groups or on a ministry team. A committee meeting is considerably more fun when she is in attendance, trust me.

Of course dancing is more than performing; it is partnering with others. Sometimes, yours will be an easy waltz, where everyone knows the steps; sometimes, the choreography will be pretty complicated, and neither of

you will know exactly how it will turn out. At times you will lead, at times she will. She may even tread on your feet, and it might hurt. As long as you speak truth in love, it's okay to be hurt. If you never risk doing anything complicated you never get to be a really good dancer, so please remember that if you ever find yourself with toes that are smarting a bit.

Dancing with Donna is so much fun that there is a risk she will exhaust herself by overfilling her dance card. She may need your help in making it okay for her to sit out a song or two. The fact is that if you ask her to, Donna will happily stop dancing and sit by your side if that is what you need. Try it, and you will come to know a side of her that is more thoughtful, more heartfelt than you see when the music is playing. If you are in need of hope, of compassion, of comforting, Donna will be there for you. She is every bit as good a listener as she is a preacher.

The simple truth is that you are going to love having Donna in your life; she will bring an infectious sense of fun and joy and playfulness that is just irresistible. She will make you laugh, and think, and argue, and wonder—just like a good minister should. What you can do for Donna is to love her, as you live through the inevitable less-than-perfect incidents that are part and parcel of a minister perfecting her craft. She has earned my abiding admiration for being so courageous about openly working on the parts of her ministry that she wishes were better. As you interact with her, you will come to respect her for her candor and for her determination, as well as for her creativity and thoughtfulness. I invite you to love her not in spite of her growing edges but because of them. It is there that you will build the foundation of your relationship. It's in the messiness of real life that our Unitarian Universalist faith brings out the best in people. Believe in your new minister; revel in the profound impact you will have on her and she on you. Take her hand, crank up the music, and put on your dancing shoes. On behalf of my whole Fellowship, please accept my very best wishes to you and to Donna for a joyful congregational life together.