

Dear Members and Friends of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa,

Rev. Eric begins: Sadly, the time has come for me to say goodbye.



At last Spring's AGM, one of you asked me how Ann's then recent move for a new job in the Boston area would affect my work with you.

As we had been a two-household family before, at the time both Ann and I thought we'd be able to manage as we had earlier. Yet we found that as we're older now, time together is more precious than ever. For years I've counseled people to choose family first. Now, the time has come to heed my own advice.

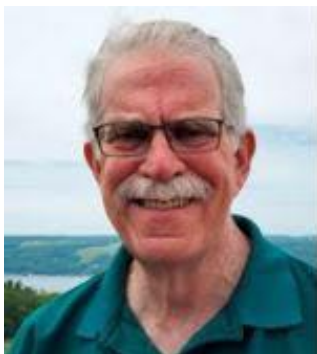
And while the "dream job" that prompted Ann's move last April is a real-world job with both joys and challenges, she loves the work (training organ donation staff) and would not be eligible to do that work in Canada. (We knew this when we moved to Ottawa, but unfortunately she found it hard to find other suitable employment here.)

Still, this was not an easy decision to make. While I had hoped to be with you longer than four years, I remain proud of what we've done in this admittedly short time. We've recovered, bruised perhaps yet even more determined, from a pandemic. Our Religious Exploration program is more energetic than it has been since well before Covid. We have just welcomed two new refugees to Ottawa and work continues to settle several more. And, finally, plans are being finalized to secure a stronger legacy with the pending construction project and ceding property to Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services for affordable housing.

The spirit of this congregation is vibrant and deeply rooted. You have much to be proud of even as you work to build an expanded future, and I am looking forward to saying exactly that with any and all colleagues who reach out to me, thinking about applying to be with you as your next minister.

I will remain with you until the end of June, and will do everything I can to assist your new minister to succeed. I look forward to hearing great things coming out of this congregation in the years to come.

And Chuck continues: It was, indeed, sad to receive this news from Rev. Eric. He has established himself well with our congregation and has been making a great difference. I and others on the board had been looking forward to working with him for many more years, but we understand his need to put family first.



However, and not to diminish the crucial role played by ministers like Rev. Eric, a congregation is really its members, and we have a strong and resilient group of members. We have gone through changes in the recent past and will be able to weather this unexpected one too.

The board has met to discuss this change. While saddened by it, the board has begun charting a way forward. In keeping with the decision a couple of decades ago that created the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), ministerial transitions are handled on a continental basis through the US-based Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), but with the involvement of the CUC. In keeping with this, Mary Ella Keblusek, the vice-president of the board, and I have spoken with the CUC and the UUA about this development and have received useful guidance.

The board believes that in order to maintain the current positive energy and momentum, it will be important to have a minister starting this August. It is expected that this minister would serve FirstU for two or three years, as the congregation decides how it wants to identify a minister for the longer term. In the next weeks, the board will be sharing information about how this process can unfold.

While this may not be an ideal situation, I believe that FirstU is in a strong position to continue moving forward. Our membership is growing, Sunday services throughout the year have been engaging and stimulating, our Religious Exploration program is attracting families, we are gaining momentum on social justice issues, and we have again demonstrated our tradition of generosity through the recent, successful pledge campaign and the related 'Help Staff Help Us' campaign. Once our campus development projects are completed, FirstU will have income that will sustain us into the future, while at the same time addressing indigenous reconciliation, providing affordable housing and likely providing funds for additional social justice activities.

Being open about our next steps will be important. The board will be sending information to congregants in many ways and will be convening opportunities for conversation and for everyone to ask questions. The first of these will be this coming Sunday, February 16, following the service. Details will be announced in this week's eUU and at the service. Please plan to participate!

In shared faith,

Rev. Eric H. Meter
Chuck Shields