

Frequently Asked Questions **about Rev. Dawn's Departure**

1. Why are you leaving?

For the past few months, I have been trying to reconnect with the passion I had for parish ministry, and slowly coming to a realization that my passion, and my vocation, has moved elsewhere. Rather than serving as a parish minister, I have realized that I am called to help congregations (plural) learn to adapt to the changes churches are experiencing in this 21st century.

I did not *want* to experience this shift in vocation. I tried to deny it. I love First Unitarian and have been honored and privileged to serve as your minister. However, I have realized that it is imperative for me to step down in order to both pursue my vocation and to allow the church to thrive.

2. Why the Southern Region?

The Southern Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association serves over 215 congregations in 12 states, Mexico, and the US Virgin Islands. It has a reputation for innovation and cutting edge growth. Indeed, the Southern Region is the only one of the 5 Unitarian Universalist Association regions that is growing in both adult membership and religious education enrollment. It is an exciting place to be!

Additionally, I am drawn to the collaborative team that has emerged in the Southern Region staff. Working at First U, I have deeply enjoyed working with an amazing ministry team made of the Minister, the Director of Religious Education, and the Music Director. Part of what I am yearning for is a way to continue to work in a team, and at the same time help congregations who have a more competitive ministry & staff experience move towards the collaboration I know is possible.

3. What happens to us now?

While an individual minister may be transient, the office of the ministry in a congregation is enduring. I will leave, as ministers before me have left, and you will, in good time, find another minister.

Most likely, there will be a period of transition, during which volunteer and professional staff provide ministerial support to the congregation. At the end of that period, the Board will hire an Interim Minister who will help the congregation through the search for a new settled minister.

Some of you have been through this process before – once, or twice, or even many times. I encourage you to help calm the anxiety of the newer friends and members who have not had this experience. All will be well. First Unitarian's reputation in the larger UUA community is very positive right now – that should give you choices when it comes to both an interim and a settled minister.

4. Will you do memorial services?

Until such time as you have an interim minister, the Board and I have arranged for me to be available to conduct memorial services on a fee-for-service basis, paid for by the church. Once the interim minister is in place, that person will be your minister and will be responsible for memorial services.

5. What about your family?

Though my work for the UUA will have me traveling frequently, my family will remain in Louisville. John, Evvie and Josie will continue to participate at First U, as will my mother, Laurie Clark.

This is an uncommon arrangement nationally that is surprisingly common at First Unitarian – the Rev. Bob Reed's wife, Jeanne, stayed several years after her husband left for ministry elsewhere, as did Joan Beale, the Rev. Richard Beale's wife. What allowed these situations to work is that the congregation was respectful about maintaining appropriate boundaries with the remaining family members. I ask that you observe the same for my family. Here are a few helpful pointers:

- Do not expect them to serve in leadership roles as that can be a conflict of interest for the new

minister;

- Do not critique the new minister in front of them, or tell my family how much you miss me;
- Don't invite John and I (as a couple) or our family to participate as a unit in a social engagement as I will not be able to attend;
- Do not ask them to pass messages to me;
- Do love them and invite them to continue to participate fully into the life of the church.

6. **Will you return?**

Other than for a memorial services during the transition period before an interim minister arrives, I will not return to First Unitarian, even for special events, for a period of at least 2.5 years. After that time, I will build a covenant with the new minister around what ways are appropriate for me to return.

7. **Can we be friends?**

The UU Minister's Association's Code of Ethics dictates that I will no longer have contact with First Unitarian Church and its members. This is complicated by the fact that we are staying in town. If we encounter each other in the grocery store, please feel free to say hello, but do not tell me anything about how the church is doing. If I am dropping off a child at your house for a playdate, we can make small-talk but, again, must avoid the topic of church.

Social media also complicates this departure. I have a policy of saying “yes” to anyone who “friends” me on facebook. However, most of these people end up in a “Restricted” category so that they see only public posts, nothing personal. I will be placing all First U congregants into this “Restricted” category. In addition, I will no longer be following your posts.

These boundaries are not about my affection for you – it is about giving you and the new minister a space to forge a new, healthy relationship.

8. **When is your last day with us?**

My last day will be Sunday, October 23, 2016.

9. **What will you be doing between now and then?**

I will spend the vast majority of my time in these coming months trying to say goodbye in a healthy, loving way. This means closing any loopholes that might exist, making sure any special knowledge that I have is shared with appropriate people, and, of course, talking to you, visiting with you, crying with you, and, hopefully, envisioning with you what wonderful things might be coming up for you.

I am available to meet with any of you who would like to do so – at church, at your home, at a coffee shop – whatever suits you. Just send me an email or give me a call to set something up.