

**Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church – Unitarian Universalist**  
**“Our Shared Ministry”**  
**The Rev. Dr. Morris Hudgins**  
**May 23, 2010**

**“...to Come Alive”**  
**Chaplain Alexandra McGee, M.Div.**

*These notes are the general outline on which I will base my extemporaneous speaking at the end of our service on Shared Ministry.*

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**ALIVENESS**

*“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” ---Howard Thurman*

Another way to look at shared ministry turns the notion a bit on its head. Perhaps we fall in to a trap by thinking too much of meeting other people’s needs. Howard Thurman, former Chaplain at Howard University, and a civil rights leader, advised: **“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”**

How does this advice pertain to us at TJMC?

It can help us avoid the temptation to do what seems serviceable, even if it makes us too tired or unfulfilled.

It encourages us to patiently wait for new blossoms of aliveness.

TJMC has 400-600 members, depending on how you count. Each of us can minister with whatever unique gifts we have been given, and we can each come more and more alive as we do so.

**CALLING**

To have a ministry means to be called to ministry. In our church here, you may find yourself called in small and large ways. One of my mentors defined a calling as having two essential parts. On the one hand, a person must be motivated from within. On the other hand, the community must affirm the calling. So, when you consider yourself taking on a task, consider: Are you truly motivated? Does the community affirm your calling? This framework helps us stay in touch with where the Spirit is leading for the greatest good of all. It also helps prevent unhealthy excesses..... (for example, did the congregation really ask you to serve on ten committees? Do you really want to? Were these decisions made with prayerful reflection?)

Another aspect of shared ministry is that ministry is uniquely spiritual.

What makes any church not just a social action group? What makes any church more than just a social club? What makes any church more than just a reflection group? That they rely on spiritual reflection together to guide interactions and social justice action.

**BODY**

One beautiful metaphor for shared ministry comes from the first Letter to the Corinthians: Quote: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.” This means that all the parts, seen and unseen, the committees that are visible (like the Worship Associates) and not so visible (like the sound crew), the activities that happen right here (like Sunday morning worship) and that don’t happen here (like a March on Washington), are all part of the shared ministry. As one body, it means that if one part needs rest, maybe the other parts can pick up the slack, .... or maybe they need to slow down the pace and take a rest, too.

*(preaching, teaching, counseling, leading worship and ritual, administering).*

*“Our ministry involves taking care of one another, maintaining an emotional and spiritual connection throughout life's changes. As we engage in mutual ministry, we feed one another. And in so doing, we are able to turn to lend our succor to the world. Our pastoral presence, our religious education, and our social action are all grounded in the ministry we give to and receive from one another.” (from The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, ed. By Buehrens and Sinkford)*

### **CELEBRATING AND GOING FORTH**

In closing, I'd like to affirm the successes of our shared ministry, and encourage us to consider new possibilities, too.

IMPACT and PACEM are clear ways that people's work together have served the wider community. Other successes are small, and unseen, like when one person writes a condolence card to another person, or gives them a gift for their home altar. Still other successes are public witnesses that have touched people we will never know about...the people who drive by and see the banner and derive hope; the people who read the sermons on line but never set foot in our church.

More potential shared ministries lie in the area of outreach to the UVA students who live in walking distance of TJMC, and letting them minister to us with their creativity and worldviews. Our shared ministry can include more interaction between all the generations, so that elders are invigorated by the youth and youth find role models in the elders. Our shared ministry could include more cross pollination with other congregations across Virginia, who are doing creative meaningful problem-solving, and would love to learn from what we are doing. Finally, shared ministry can mean things that you and I can't even imagine yet, because the Sacred Spirit calls us to be constantly alert to the gifts that are right in front of us, but that we are yet to see.