



## Rev. Lee Bluemel's Welcome to the North Parish

I'm delighted you have visited our faith community, as each new face makes our church more vibrant, diverse, active and alive. Here are just a few of the ways that we describe ourselves:

**We are a joyful congregation.** North Parish is a place to find renewal, regeneration and yes, even joy. In our worship services we are always treated to beautiful music, we always sing and we often share our joys and sorrows. Just sitting in the sanctuary, watching the seasons change outside the beautiful old windows is a spirit-renewing practice. The children and youth bring their own joyful energy, curiosity, observations and creative expressions to our life together, and we gladly offer witness to various rites of passage from child dedications to children's milestone ceremonies to weddings. Even as we mourn at memorial services, we also celebrate the life of the person who has passed on, finding inspiration in how they positively impacted the world.

**We are a diverse and multi-generational congregation.** Infants, toddlers, children, youth, young adults, Gen X's and Y's, baby boomers, retirees in various types of retirement, elders – you will see us all here, creating a community. We come with so many different kinds of backgrounds, challenges and human experiences. We come in all phases of our lives, with rich stories of courage and struggle that you might not guess just from looking at us. We welcome all who are curious about how we might fulfill our purpose individually and collectively, all who are curious about discovering and sharing what it means to be human.

**We are a “welcoming” congregation.** In Unitarian Universalism, a “welcoming congregation” refers to an official designation given by the Unitarian Universalist Association. This designation is received after the church has completed a self-audit and put processes in place to make sure we are truly welcoming to gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex people—one group of people historically unwelcomed and oppressed by the institutional church. All people of good will are welcome at our table.

**We are a “mission focused” congregation.** This means that we take our mission seriously, and use it to guide our priorities and our planning for the future. Our mission includes creating a welcoming religious community for newcomers, taking responsibility for our own spiritual growth and that of our children, participating in the democratic governance of the church, and putting our faith into action in the wider world.

**We are a “small group” congregation.** This means that we recognize the best way to begin to make connections and enter into the life of the church is through any one of our many small groups. These include everything from bi-monthly “small group ministry” circles, to a variety of musical ensembles, to one-time adult spirituality classes, to social action project teams, to religious education and youth small groups. If you want to get connected, please speak with me, with Membership Coordinator Carolyn Zimmer or a “yellow tag” greeter on Sundays.

**We are a “permission-granting” congregation.** This means that if you come up with an idea that is in line with our mission, permission is granted to go ahead and do what you are called to do! If you find yourself hankering to get more involved, our task forces and committees are delighted by new ideas and energy. If you find yourself beginning a sentence with “I think the church should...”—please, don't hesitate to follow your instincts. You can always ask me or any member to act as a sounding board.

**We are a “safe congregation.”** This means that we have deliberate policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of all members of our community, including the most vulnerable among us. If you have concerns or questions about Safe Congregation, please contact the Parish Council.

**We are a theologically deep and “multi-lingual” congregation.** This means that we desire to truly honor one another's integrity, honesty and desire to live examined and spiritually full lives, even as we have come to a variety of conclusions on theological matters. I will often use what I call “parallel language” when speaking in theological terms. For example, you may hear me say “the spirit of God, the spirit of love” in the same sentence, as there are some for whom the word “God” is a doorway opening to meaning and for others it is a doorway shut. As it is said in some Buddhist circles, there are 1,001 doors to enlightenment. We mean to open as many of them as we can, together!

There are many other ways to describe our community—vibrant, active, alive, ever evolving, grounded, hopeful, and deeply sustained by love. If you have questions, concerns or thoughts to offer, or a story to tell, I am always happy to meet with you. Welcome!



## Becoming a Member of the North Parish

The North Parish is a welcoming congregation; we value the inherent worth and dignity of each person. Membership entails both benefits and responsibilities. If you would like to become a member of the North Parish, please follow these steps:

- ✓ **Get to know us** by attending worship services, fellowship dinners, classes and other events. If you have children who may be interested in attending, check out our Religious Education programs. Introduce yourself to the Rev. Lee Bluemel.
- ✓ **Sign the guest registry.** Let us know that you're thinking about joining, and indicate if you'd like the Minister, the Director of Religious Education or the Membership Committee chairperson to follow up with you to answer any questions.
- ✓ **Ask for a Membership Packet** after the service. This packet contains information about Unitarian Universalism and the North Parish that should help you make a decision about membership. The packet also contains all the necessary paperwork.
- ✓ **Attend the New UU class**, where you'll meet other newcomers, and you'll learn about Unitarian Universalism, our programs here at the North Parish, and about the responsibilities and benefits of membership. If you cannot attend, please make an appointment to speak to the Minister or the Membership Committee Chairperson.
- ✓ **Fill out the paperwork.** Once you've decided to become a member, fill out the following forms:
  - Member Application.* After you've filled this out, it will be given to our office administrator so your name can be added to our directory and on the subscription roles for our electronic newsletter and the magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Association, *UU World*. This form allows you to indicate some ways in which you might like to help out and build connections with other members of the congregation.
  - Commitment of Support Form.* This pledge form asks you to estimate the financial support you expect to be able to give the church. The congregation adopts a budget each May for the following church (fiscal) year, based upon our expected income, which is largely determined by the members' commitments of support.
  - Religious Education Enrollment Form.* If your children or teens have been attending, you may have already enrolled them via this form. If not, this should be completed before they participate in the Religious Education or Youth Group programs.
- ✓ **Attend the next New Member Welcoming Ceremony** held several times a year. New members will be introduced to the congregation during the service. The Board of Trustees will vote on accepting your membership application; following that, this ceremony recognizes you as a new member.
- ✓ **Attend a New Member Potluck.** The Membership Committee will invite you to the next one after your welcoming ceremony. This is a great way to get to know other new members.
- ✓ **Dive in!** Continue to come to events on Sunday, and at other times, and find the areas of our ministry that most appeal to you, both as a participant and as a volunteer. Come to congregational meetings to participate in our governance and help shape the decisions that will guide the North Parish.

## Benefits and Responsibilities of Membership

Members of the North Parish consider it their “spiritual home.” Members enjoy both the benefits of this home and carry the responsibility for maintaining it.

### Benefits

- ✳ Our worship services bring us together as a loving community, uplifting our spirits, and touching our hearts.



They foster our spiritual growth, provide us with time for meditation and transcendent music, and challenge us to live our lives according to Unitarian Universalist principles and beliefs. While the Minister leads most of these services, we also enjoy guest preachers and lay led services. In weekly worship, members have the opportunity to play many key roles.

- ✳ We have a unique, interactive children’s religious education program that kids actually like to attend. Through storytelling, role-playing, skits and hands-on creative arts kids learn about the world’s great religions and their traditions and are encouraged to develop their own personal spiritual path following UU principles and beliefs. Members participate in this religious education, under the overall guidance of our Director of Religious Education (DRE).
- ✳ Through our numerous Small Group Ministries, members have the opportunity to get to know and support others in a smaller setting (six to 12 people).
- ✳ The North Parish has a strong tradition in social action and in being a catalyst for progressive change in the Merrimack Valley. Members have the opportunity to work with others to give back to the community through programs such as the People’s Pantry, Habitat for Humanity, Bread & Roses meals, Stand and Deliver tutoring, Partakers Prison Ministry and the Merrimack Valley Project.
- ✳ Group and individual social opportunities abound. These include an annual fall weekend retreat at Ferry Beach, Maine, Youth Groups, Senior Lunch Bunch, discussions groups, potluck suppers, a Christmas Carol sing-along, bike rides, and walks for charities. New friendships are quickly made at the North Parish.
- ✳ Members are expected to participate in the democratic governance of the church. We jointly decide on the mission, budget, and overall operation of the church. Only members may vote in the Annual Meeting.



### Responsibilities

- ✳ Members are expected to participate in Sunday worship and church activities. This is critical to keeping our spiritual community strong.
- ✳ Members are expected to support the North Parish financially. The North Parish is totally self-supporting. While no specific amounts are prescribed, all members are expected to make a fair share commitment of support for each upcoming fiscal year, which is used to help the church complete its annual budget and financial plan, and then to fulfill that commitment over the course of the year.
- ✳ Members are encouraged to participate in the democratic governance of the church. This includes attending and voting at the annual meeting (where the budget is set) and participating in the various Committees, Task Forces and small groups where the work of the Church is performed. Members define the vision and mission of the church, within the broader principles of Unitarian Universalism.

## Our Vital Community

Our North Parish community relies on volunteer participation to ensure that our Sunday morning worship and social hour as well as other North Parish events run smoothly and that our facilities are cared for. We ask all members to pitch in several times per year on one or more of these simple, sociable, one-shot helping opportunities. The membership application includes a section where you will be able to indicate which activities you would like to join or help out with.

### We appreciate your participation!

**Ushering.** Arrive at church about 20 minutes before the worship service. Look over the printed usher instructions located in the back of the church, which will also be e-mailed to you the Friday prior to the service. Give attendees the Order of Service as they enter the church. Follow the instructions for passing the offering baskets, counting attendees, etc. This job is well defined and easy.

**Coffee Hour Help.** Arrive at church about 15 minutes before the worship service. Help out in the kitchen by setting the table for coffee, placing mugs on the table, getting cream and sugar/sweetener, tea and any goodies ready, help make the coffee, boil water for tea. During coffee hour, check to see that what needs to be refilled is taken care of. Rinse, load and unload the dishwasher. This job is one of helping out the team working coffee hour; a great way to chat with people in the kitchen.

**Greeting Visitors.** Arrive at church about 15 minutes before the worship service. Greet people as they enter the church. Guide visitors to fill out a guest registry form and to make a nametag. This job is good for someone who is comfortable speaking to people they don't know.

**Sunday Religious Education Support.** Help out in non-teaching support activities for the children's religious education program during one of the inter-generational services. These services occur about once a month and during the Advent season. Help is needed directing the children in multi-aged activities after they attend part of the service. This job is a good way to see our RE program; it's a great way to meet the youth of our community.

**Volunteer at monthly Coffeehouse.** You needn't join the committee to help out at the Crossroads Coffeehouse. Volunteers are needed to help out in the kitchen before the concert and during the break; take money at the door and sell CDs and related stuff during the break. This job is great for someone who is interested in music.

**Set-up or clean-up for a church event.** North Parish holds potluck dinners, training sessions, hosts a local food pantry and many other events. We need people with muscle to move tables and chairs around and put them back when the event is done. This job is great for someone who wants to connect with a smaller group of people before attending a larger church event. Of course, you're welcome to stay for whatever event you're helping out at!



**Help Cook for Bread and Roses.** Once a month, North Parish prepares a meal to be delivered and served at the Bread and Roses soup kitchen in Lawrence. A team of people volunteers to do this job and an extra volunteer, to help out where needed, is always welcome. This is a great opportunity for someone who wants to connect with a small group of people at North Parish.

**Join a Clean-up Crew.** At various times during the year, the House and Grounds Committee asks for volunteers to join them cleaning up and/or repairing our church. This is a great job for someone who is handy with tools, a paint brush, or gardening.

**Other Ways to Help.** Sometimes, new (and existing) members bring particular talents, skills or abilities that can help the church fulfill its mission in ways we haven't thought of. Everything else on this list is important, but if you can suggest another way that you could be particularly helpful, we encourage your creativity.

### Thanks!

We know you'll get to meet some wonderful people while you help make North Parish a stronger, more vital community!