

On behalf of co-moderator Elandria Williams and myself, I bring congratulations to Kim on your ordination and to the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis on calling and today installing Kim as your settled minister. We have been given the great privilege of charging you, the congregation. In this setting, a charge is a call to action and a reminder to live into your shared ministry with faith and courage.

Our charge comes in 6 parts...

First: Learn your history. You were the first congregation west of the Mississippi and have a rich history connected to the beginnings of city institutions such as museums, orphanages, day care centers, and more. 50 or so years ago your congregation chose to remain in the city rather than relocate to the suburbs, though you are now surrounded by gentrification – consider how you are contributing to this and how it has and does change your relationship to your surrounding neighborhoods and the city.

The history of your ministry is wide and varied. Like many of our congregations you have had successes and challenges with your staff. Don't shy away from the hard stuff and the hurt it caused – find the patterns present in them, learn, and choose to be different, to be stronger. Hold one another accountable to good boundaries and boundless (and appropriate, consensual, holy) Love.

Second: Live our faith, day in and day out, when it is easy, convenient, and when it stinking hurts and you don't want to. Live our faith in your daily living, not just when you are here on Sunday mornings. Live our faith so brightly that everyone around you knows you are a Unitarian Universalist and knows what being a Unitarian Universalist means! Use your collective power for good in the world – stay engaged and partner with other organizations and groups within and around St. Louis, groups who are working to dismantle white supremacy culture in the city, in the state, in the country, and around the world. And remember that doing so begins right here, right now, in your congregation.

Third: Lean towards justice through education and activism and not just by contributing money (though that is important too)! Consider where you have personal power and use it to change systems for good. Investigate the policies and practices of your workplaces and volunteer organizations – do they provide protections for the queer folk, for people of color, and those living with disabilities? Influence the systems you are already in to ensure that all among us have similar opportunities to flourish in life for that is part of our religious responsibility.

Fourth: Make space to be radical and take risks. Do what Karen Bellevance Grace frames in Full Week Faith as experilearning. Don't be afraid to try things differently – no new venture is a failure if you learn from your doing. Think and act outside the box and outside your comfort zone. If you are comfortable most of the time, consider what it might be like to be less comfortable sometimes so that others might be more comfortable.

Fifth: Nurture into leadership the youth and young adults around you. Kim, Allison, Elandria, and I all know each other because elders before us nurtured us into leadership. We each began our journey to national religious leadership by having opportunities in our youth years and deepening our connection to Unitarian Universalism while growing our leadership skills in our young adult years. We are not where we are by accident but because elders both nurtured us into being and created spaces where we could thrive as leaders. Create such spaces here in your congregation.

And sixth (I saved the most important for last): Tend to your shared ministry with Kim. Remind her to care for herself as she cares for you. Support her involvement in Roller Derby with the same gusto you support her preaching and justice work. Encourage her to pursue her passions here and afar. Respect her boundaries and need for time away. Trust that in return she will be here for you for years to come.

In summary:

Learn your history

Live our faith

Lean towards justice

Make space to be radical and take risks

Nurture into leadership the youth and young adults

Tend to your shared ministry

Blessings to you and to Kim on this joyous occasion.