



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Making Room for You!”

© by the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA
Reflections delivered on February 25, 2018
At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no [person] can sincerely try to help another without helping [themselves] ... Serve and thou shall be served. Ralph Waldo Emerson †

All human beings are like travelers floating down the eternal river of time, embarking at a certain point and disembarking again at another point in order to make room for others waiting below the river to come aboard. Lin Yutang

Seeing leadership as an opportunity and a tool for spiritual growth also means seeing the work of leadership in a new light. Accomplishing tasks becomes secondary; learning to engage deeply and mindfully...becomes primary. Erik Walker Wikstrom †

Three Reflections:

Lee Cornell

Reverend Gary Kowalski said in a sermon,

“People who come to Unitarian Universalism seeking spiritual goods are likely to be disappointed so long as they have the outlook of consumers in search of material goods. If their connection to our liberal faith is to grow into something more rewarding, they have to give up the consumer mindset and begin to think of themselves instead as shareholders, investors, co-owners in what happens in the church.”

This is how I approach my association with any group, as a partner with a joint share in our success.

In every volunteer driven organization there are many tasks that need to be done and a need for many hands to do those tasks. For me serving on our Board of Trustees was just one of those volunteer tasks that needed to be done, a role in service of the community, leading to the success of the organization, and service is my spiritual practice.

As a Board member I built the type of relationships that only come from working closely with another as part of a team. I was able to deepen my relationship with our Fellowship by working

closely with the leaders of other teams and committees to learn how their team interprets and supports our shared Mission and Vision. Having only been a UU for a year before being asked to join the board, I enjoyed talking with board members who have been lifelong UUs, hearing of their experiences growing up in our faith community. I witnessed the varied approaches to our governance and faith during our discussions prior to a vote. While there were many times my opinion was swayed during the discussion. My most transformative experience was when I finally worked up the courage to speak my conviction on a topic and vote with my heart even though I was the only Nay in a room full of Yeas. There **were** no repercussions. No one treated me differently.....

It was at that point I understood the full meaning of ours being a loving and accepting community. We share, we learn, we grow, we develop relationships, we support each other. As board members we did it all as a service in support of UUFA and through our Fellowship the wider community. Serving as a Board member **was** about more than the work performed at our 90 minute meeting each month. **That** was just the fun part.

But I **am** a governance junkie. I enjoy delving into the interactions of the different parts of the organization and its people, considering how a minor decision for one part impacts other parts in major ways. I enjoy the process, order, and flow of a well executed meeting. I enjoy reflective contemplation of bylaws, policies, and procedures. I even like working with the budget, trying to cover infinite needs with finite funds. While I hope that you will consider being a Board member because it can be an extremely rewarding personal experience; I understand that not everyone is suited for Board service.

As members of this fellowship we covenant to “Commit time, talent and treasure to promote positive change in ourselves and in the world”. There is room for everyone in our congregational life and there is room for everyone to support our Mission and Vision through service to UUFA. And through that service there is room and opportunity to achieve more wholeness, satisfaction, depth, and meaning in our lives and the lives around us.

Regardless of how you serve, I challenge everyone to get more deeply engaged in our Fellowship whether it is through participation or service. As members and friends of this community we all move along the UUFA Stepping Stones of engagement as we feel called and I look forward to participating and serving alongside you.

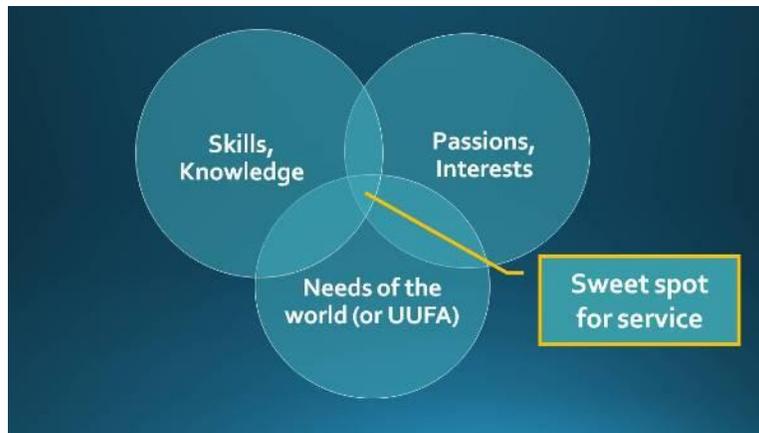
Linda Gilbert

Good morning. I'm Linda Gilbert, the current President of the Board of Trustees.

This is not a position that I expected to occupy when I first walked into UUFA. Fortunately, I wasn't called to do that on day one! Instead, I was invited to work with RE – religious exploration. That turned out to be a bigger job than expected, but it was also more rewarding than expected. Friendships that were forged doing that work are some of the strongest I have here. Working together with a shared purpose or goal draws people together like nothing else does.

As I took on other positions within UUFA, I realized that volunteer work, like housework, can expand to fill all the time available. Unfortunately, burnout is the normal result. Since I didn't want that, I set specific limits for myself. At any given time, I will serve in *one* office or in one major committee role, like the RE committee or the Board; I will do *one* thing that feeds my own soul and sense of connection, such as Small Group or Circle Suppers; and then I will do "one-off" activities such as Nifty Gifty as my time, energy, and interest allow. I have found these boundaries helpful in letting me say "no" where I need to. I've also found them useful in helping me to say "yes" to bigger things, because my energies are less scattered.

Those of you who know me know that I like models. Here are two that I'd like to share.



The first addresses how to find your own "sweet spot" for contribution at the intersection of your strengths, your interests or passions, and the needs before you. I'm interested in process, and (on most days) relatively good at organization, so there's a lot of scope for that!

The second model that I'd like to share comes from my background in education.



All of us have a comfort zone, where we feel competent and safe. When we get too far out of it, feelings of danger usually send us fleeing back. In between comfort and danger is our "risk" zone. That's also our learning zone. To grow, to learn, to become more than we are, we *must* step out of our comfort zone.

The amazing thing is that when we accept that step and leave our comfort zone, we end up expanding it. Our zone grows with our learning.

Accepting responsibility at UUFA has definitely been a learning experience for me. When I was asked to serve on the Board, the first thing I did was to look at the job description. (Did you know we have job descriptions for a number of our roles? We do, and they are very helpful in terms of both defining scope and recruitment. If your role doesn't have one, you should consider writing one!)

Anyway, I took a look at the job description for a Board Member, and my reaction to that was like the little engine's: "I think I can." At first, it was a stretch. But the wonderful thing about volunteering at UUFA is that you don't have to do it in isolation. There was an orientation. There was existing structure. There were other members of the board to share responsibility, as well as our minister and staff.

This process repeated itself when I was asked to be Vice President of the Board – "Let me look at the description... I think I can" – and again when I was asked to be President. At each stage, it's been a stretch. But at each stage, I've had the expertise of others to help me learn. At each stage, I've been glad that I've practiced this particular form of acceptance.

My tenure as Board President will end July 1st. I'll actually be a bit sorry to step aside, now that I've gotten somewhat comfortable in this role. But it's important to leave before comfort hardens into rigidity. And it's even more important to make room for new leaders, so that this growth experience is available to others.

Jane Mayer

Linda, Lee and I were asked to speak about our experiences as past presidents of the Board of Trustees. By telling our stories, we hope to inspire you to consider serving this congregation as well – on a committee or on the Board.

It is, in fact much easier to volunteer since we started the governance/ministry model. So many people have worked hard to make the change to our current model and we have accomplished so much in the past 10 years. The governance/ministry model has enabled us to create work flows, provide support to our minister through the lay ministry program, we have the stepping stone program which helps people find their way toward making deeper connections, we have charters for each committee, job descriptions for elected positions and so much more. I think in the past people said no to volunteering because they had no idea what they were volunteering for or what they were getting themselves into.

Those days are gone. We have grown past the concept of just looking for bodies to fill positions. Each position on the board has a job description, where responsibilities are spread out among the board members and this means the president doesn't have to do everything. The board also operates differently now and doesn't have to micromanage. That means they aren't getting bogged down in the weeds but now have the time to discuss important issues that affect our congregation and to think about strategic planning. Don't you think we should have some idea of where we want to be 5 or 10 years from now? I think we do.

I remember many rewarding discussions with the board where we thought we had a consensus and then someone would express a completely different perspective and through more discussion and

deep listening, we ended up in a different place. I remember sitting back and thinking that was so awesome! It was awesome because we could only accomplish that by being ourselves, by giving of ourselves and being kind to each other. These kinds of discussions require a level of trust, and the ability to put the needs of the fellowship before any personal special interest. The importance of these discussions to the work that we do here cannot be understated. Being involved with that work is what made serving on the board so rewarding. I love working with a small group toward a common goal. That is a spiritual practice for me as I know it is for many of you. Serving provided an opportunity for me to get out of my own head, think about what is in the best interest of this congregation and to work on something bigger than myself. I have found that the more I put into this congregation, the more I get out of it.

I truly believe that healthy congregations have a cycle of leadership. I have followed that cycle by starting out working on committees, then chairing committees, going through the lay ministry program and then serving on the board and becoming president. After that, I stepped back. I didn't go away completely, but I am involved on a much smaller scale. Soon I plan to re-enter the cycle and start it all over. It is that circular pattern of working up through leadership and then stepping back that actually makes room for others to experience the rewards and exhilaration that I have felt. But the only way we can stay a healthy, vital and robust congregation is if we have others who will step up and give of themselves to benefit the larger group. Today is Stewardship Sunday and we do need your treasures. But we need your time and talents as well to make us the beacon of liberal religion we aspire to.

Forrest Church a UU minister in New York wrote a sermon titled "Life Is A Team Sport". In this sermon he talks about the congregation as the ultimate in team sports. He is right when he said, "...most of what builds us up we don't do by ourselves. We do it with each other."

I think about the good work we have done here and the work still to be done. Our mission and vision are important – to us and to our larger community. I have felt honored to serve this congregation because this is my home. This is your home too. I can only hope that if you get the call to serve – say yes. Say yes and know you won't be alone. Say yes knowing you will have the guidance and support that you need. Bring your authentic self knowing you will be heard, valued and appreciated. This truly is a team sport. We can't play without you. Deepen your connection to UUFA and just say yes. You won't regret it.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. What room have you made in your life for something new? What encourages or discourages you from accepting new challenges or new responsibilities?
2. Have you accepted leadership positions in school, work, or elsewhere, and, if so, how did that experience affect or change you? What wisdom or insight did you gain?
3. Do you believe your relationship with money is healthy or not, and why? Do you approach money with an attitude of scarcity or abundance? What might move you to greater generosity?