

27 October, 2013

Dear UU Minister:

Congratulations! If you're reading this letter, you must be far enough along in the process to be considered a candidate for ministry with the UU Fellowship of Durango. I think it is an extraordinary opportunity...and, of course, it needs to be the right fit for the candidate. My association with the Fellowship began in my last few years of my Presidency of UUSC when I was invited to the pulpit in Durango about once a year. For the past few years I've visited once in fall and once in the spring.

You will or will have formed your own opinions about the Fellowship, so please only treat my observations as supplemental information that might help you as further questions in your discernment process.

The Fellowship is a delightful and growing community that was founded by a few people who have exerted extraordinarily positive and strong influence on the Fellowship at different times, both because of their personal commitment and because of their generosity. When the Fellowship was very small and without their own building several people moved very quickly to secure an option for the current building. That and the generosity of a few members made it possible for the congregation to make the decision to pursue the purchase. It has been a love affair ever since with the congregation pitching in to gradually remodel the building step by step as well as to landscape the grounds, the patio, and the play areas. The Fellowship has grown to use the space and facility creatively and expansively for themselves and for activities that could attract members of the community.

The Fellowship has functioned autonomously for many years, i.e. without a minister. They're quite proud of their achievements and as you can imagine there is some hesitation about a minister. Some welcome what a minister

can mean and others lament that it might mean giving up a lot. So it will by necessity need to be a 'shared' ministry, one in which the congregation shares authority and responsibility with the minister. The minister will need to be sensitive to the issues of the 'founders' for lack of a better word, who have nurtured and made possible so much of the growth, but are also needing to gradually let go.

Like any UU congregation there some who are leery of anything that feels too much like 'church' or 'religion' and those who perhaps miss some of the ritual from the religion from which they retreated. What I have repeatedly found is a generosity of spirit, a thirst about issues of fairness, a desire to go the extra mile to create community, and a willingness to try to work out differences. This is also a congregation that likes to do things together whether it's hiking, camping, circle dinners, or listening to concerts. They like to laugh and have fun as well as ponder and address the injustices they sense around Durango and in the world. I believe they would appreciate a minister that helps the congregation engage in social justice, but doesn't take on too much of that role herself or himself, i.e. that listens to the congregation and creates the opportunity for them to be the actors.

They are growing and know that a lot of growth will come from attracting families. The growth in RE has been steady and important for the Fellowship. They are aware there needs to be a lot more growth to provide enough revenue to support a full-time minister on a permanent basis. I think it will be essential that the minister have some experience and comfort level with raising funds, which would include pledges, events, perhaps some grant writing, as well as managing a budget.

I would characterize the congregation as *very* liberal. So much so, in fact, that it may be important to carve out voice space and safety for people who may not be as progressive in thought and deed. So helping the congregation engage in conversations with people who believe or think very differently than themselves might be a valuable undertaking at some point. Like many communities in the U.S. they may exist within a bubble of like-minded people and simply need to get to know people who believe differently, so they can explore where there might be common ground.

If it hasn't come across in this letter yet, I am very fond of this congregation and think being the minister could be a marvelous experience for you as well as for the Fellowship. I suppose, if you are coming from an urban area, it will take some getting used to being *the* minister in a fairly small town, because everyone may 'know your business.' On the other hand, this is one of the most enjoyable group of UUs that I have known and I've probably spoken in more than a hundred UU congregations. I know a number of newer members have come to Durango as non-UUs, attend services for a while and then consider themselves UUs not because of any tenets or beliefs, but the wonderful company they find in this Fellowship.

So being a minister here will take some sensitivity, but isn't that true everywhere? They need a good listener, someone who can help them bridge differences, as well as someone who appreciates the value of diversity of thought (as well as many other kinds of diversity). There's quote by Lao Tzu, which probably sums it up pretty well: *A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.* If one can lead in the Durango Fellowship with that spirit, the sky is the limit.

I wish you well in exploring this very special responsibility and equally special opportunity. Please don't hesitate to call or email me, if you have any questions. I look forward to eventually meeting you.

Sincerely,



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