

When to Call the Minister

Sept 9, 2007, UUCG

Rev. Ann Marie Alderman

My partner, Karen, and I are getting settled in our new home, and we are starting to learn our way around town. We have become very familiar with the road to the home improvement store. Once we get there, I have not been shy in asking the “experts” how you go about doing whatever the latest thing I think is that needs to be done to make our house more live-able.

I have been and will continue to seek out the expertise of my colleagues in ministry, as you and I journey together. The Thomas Jefferson District Executive is already set to visit our congregation for “start up” conversation with me and UUCG’s leaders in mid-November to make sure we are on the right track with each other and doing what needs to be done to grow and flourish in our relationship with each other.

I have already started attending the monthly meetings of the eastern Carolina UU ministers. I will continue to seeking out the “experts”, UU or otherwise, to help me be the best minister I can be for you, for UUCG, and for Greenville.

But, no matter how educated and informed, I might become, I won’t be your minister until you seek me out! Being your minister is not just about listening to what I have to say on Sundays... [although that’s very important!]...It is about choosing to contact me for your “ministerial” needs; and sharing with me who you are, what you know, inviting me to “do ministry” with you.

You will find a list of occasions in your orders of service when I hope you will call me. I am here to help you celebrate, to comfort you, to challenge and inspire you. Please call me, send me an e-mail, do what ever it takes to initiate contact with me when you need me to be your minister.

In these first few months, I would love just to get to know you better.

So, I will seek you out when I sense you have a ministerial need. I suspect the UUCG grapevine will keep me informed about some of your concerns. I will be listening for your needs during joys and concerns, and during our “casual” conversations. You may not know or not yet be ready to seek me out in a direct way. So, I will to respond to what I hear and see as best I can. In so doing I hope to teach you what I am here for.

Sometimes, some of you may come to me seeking to convey not just the needs of some one else, but a “concern” that third person has with me. Let me warn you, ahead of

time, that if you come to me to communicate someone else's concern, I am likely to hear what you have to say not as an expression of their concern, but as yours!

It is my hope that we will not go to a third party to say what we need to say to the person with whom we have a concern. I believe that trust and respect happen when we choose to be open and direct with each other.

So, I invite you to be open and direct with me, with whatever you need to say to me!

There are four groups of reasons on the list you have for contacting me: for celebrations, for information or education, for pastoral care, and for help with group dynamics.

- 1.) If you have a religious ceremony in mind, contact me! Such things as a child dedication, becoming a member, a wedding, a union, a memorial service, or for any other transitional time that marks an ending and a beginning in your life and our life together...call me. I want to be involved!

Any urge to celebrate a major transition in your life should be accompanied with a call to your minister! Transitional events particularly those that include making promises to support one another, to love or nurture one another, any sort of definitive step towards new being, should be at the core of our communal spiritual lives, and celebrated within this religious community.

- 2.) It is appropriate to contact me for information or education regarding any aspect of UUism, for adult or children's religious education concerns, if you want to teach a class, or see a certain class offered, or if you want one-on-one time to explore your faith, or your core beliefs. There are plenty of books and resources to turn to for information or for education. You could find these on your own. It would be easier to just ask me!

UU ministers are among the most highly educated, most widely read, most theologically sophisticated clergy that you will find. Many of us have particular specialties. I know a lot about congregational polity, faith development, psychology and religion, liberal and feminist theology...Like most UU parish ministers, I have spent years integrating specific bodies of religious knowledge with personal religious faith and practice. All UU parish ministers are experts to one degree or another on how to integrate personal faith with corporate/congregational expression.

I am always ready to hear what you are excited about learning next. I am here to help you explore religion and spirituality, to help you widen your horizons, to deepen your knowledge, to grow in understanding, to help connect with others who

have your same interests or concerns, to help you to understand those in this community who are different in their faith orientation and practice from you.

3.) It is appropriate to call me for comfort or guidance, or help with hearing yourself think, for a confidential place to express your feelings, to talk about illness, death, transitions, for presence during a crisis or trauma...Pastoral care is about deep listening, giving comfort, recognizing when the door is open for spiritual growth.

Most UU ministers are trained in “brief counseling”, specifically knowing how to identify growing edges, to comfort and be present during times of crisis. Most UU ministers are trained to be aware of their limitations while offering pastoral care and to make appropriate referrals when the need to be addressed goes beyond their skill set. Ministers are trained to listen for and explore what role your faith or your core beliefs are taking in helping or hindering your move through a transitional point in your life. I happen to have extensive training and experience in pastoral care.

Part of pastoral care is to be available to you when you are upset or disappointed with me. You can expect to receive a good listen. You can expect that what you have to express will be kept within the bounds of confidentiality. When I am engaged in giving pastoral care, my focus will be on you and your needs.

I am your minister, yet...I am also human! Like with all *human* interactions, you may come to me at a time when I am distracted, defensive, reactive, and am not able to offer you a good listen. Even when you’ve done your part and initiated contact and have been clear that you are looking for pastoral care, there will be times when my needs will get in the way of meeting your needs. I will tell you when we need to arrange for another time, so that I can get myself out of the way!...and be able to listen to you without getting defensive, without rushing to “fix” the problem, without trying to end your discomfort....

I will do my best to listen to you...to listen to whatever you have to say, whatever you feel, with respect that you are coming to me to be heard, to be companioned until you find your way again. I promise to give the space for you to say whatever you need to say. If I am not able to be fully present to you, I will acknowledge that and help you turn to someone who can be. This is partially what a Committee on Ministry is for, to be there to listen to you when the minister is unable to.

When I am present with you I will create space for you to hear your own wisdom; for you to find your own way to continue to be in loving relationship with yourself. I believe this is what pastoral care is really all about.

- 4.) It is appropriate to call me, when you are looking for help to navigate your way through the small groups to which you belong or wish to belong, that are within and connected to this congregation. It is appropriate to call me for learning how to get more involved, to learn how to contribute your time, talents, your passions, when you are disappointed with the church or excited about it, when you are upset with someone and would like coaching about how to approach them.

I believe the minister should be at the hub of what goes on in the church community. I don't and won't know every detail of every interaction. But I will be developing a sense of how all our interrelationships fit together. As I learn more about UUCCG as a system, I will be able to help newcomers know how this system works. I am here to be both a stabilizer of this system when it seems to be leaning towards chaos or conflict, and an agitator for change when the system leans towards rigidity.

I am here ready for your call. I am here to be your minister...to celebrate life with you, to help you grow, to hold you through change, to guide you in your interactions with each other....

There are so many of you that I don't yet know. Call me. I would love to visit you in your homes, or at your place of work. I want to know what motivates you to be a part of this community. I want to know what you are expert at, what you struggle with, who or what is important to you and why.

I want to know what your hopes and dreams are for yourself as an individual, for your family, for this congregation and this community.

Call me!

Ann Marie

(bulletin insert listing reasons to call the minister follows next page)

When to Call the Minister (a bulletin insert to accompany the sermon)

- When you would like to talk about your faith or your religious values...
- When you would like to talk about joining the church, or finding a place here to contribute your gifts, time and talent...
- When you want to get acquainted or introduce yourself to the minister...
- When someone close to you has died or is critically ill, and you would like to talk...
- When you are to be hospitalized, or know someone who is and would appreciate a visit...
- When you are confined to your home and would appreciate a visit...
- When you are planning to be married or to have a commitment ceremony...
- When you would like to have your child dedicated...
- When you would like to discuss memorial service planning...
- When you have personal or family problems you would like to discuss... with your job, children, relationship, or anything else where a sympathetic ear might help...
- When you are faced with an important decision and would like someone with whom to talk...
- When you would like to learn more about Unitarian Universalism...
- When you have an idea for adult religious education programming in the church...
- When you are disappointed with the church or excited about the church and would like to talk about it...
- When you are upset with someone and would like some coaching on how best to address the person directly...
- When you are either upset with the minister or pleased with the minister and would like to share your thoughts, feelings and ideas...
- When you feel called to offer your talents and energy to the church and its larger purpose, and seek help finding the right place to serve...

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