An Interview with Rev. Kathy Huff, Senior Minister

Question:
What is your vision for our church, in terms of its spiritual offerings and role in the wider community?

Rev. Kathy:
Our church has a unique role to play in the City of Oakland and the East Bay. We are a historic church with a modern day commitment to meaningfully embody and serve our urban setting. There are many people, programs and ministries already active in numerous areas of our congregational life fulfilling this mission. Many of us are also experiencing a sense of urgency about our aspirations to more fully counter oppression and become an authentic anti-racist, multicultural congregation. We see this as a spiritual necessity, a requirement of living our Unitarian Universalism in this time and place.

I've recently attempted to name this commitment with renewed vigor by inviting our congregation to embark on Vision 2012. This is an emerging five-year vision about deepening our experience and creation of beloved community by expanding our welcome table. The “welcome table” is the metaphor we frequently use to describe not only who we would like to see at the table of our liberal faith but also about how we want to be together with one another. Vision 2012 is about becoming more intentionally engaged in extending deep hospitality to one another within the church as well as outside the church walls. This is not just about being nice, though that helps. Rather this is about the deepest level of human engagement, of treating each other as our “best beloveds.” It is about recognizing that divine spark in one another and being willing to let it shine forth. I have a profound yearning that our congregation will someday more fully reflect the full range of race, class, dis/ability, gender identity, sexual orientation and multicultural diversity that exists in our community. My prayer is that all of us will experience the kind of radical acceptance that makes possible a truly welcoming and inclusive beloved community.

Question:
What is your philosophy of ministry and religious leadership? How do you manifest it in your role at the church?

Rev. Kathy:
Our ministry is one of mutuality and collaboration. As the senior minister, while I have a particular role in helping to advance and keep the overall mission and vision of the church in personal and institutional focus, the task of nourishing the church as a spiritual center, a voluntary association and a nonprofit corporation is a shared effort. Our “shared ministry model” means that ministry is not just what the clergy do. It is what we all do as religious people to make real the mission of the church. At First Unitarian lay people create and shape church policy and practices, lead worship, provide pastoral care, make music, teach classes, create justice programs, keep the buildings in shape and so much more. When people join the church one of the expectations of membership is to develop and find one’s own ministry within the life of the congregation.
**Question:**
What would you say to newcomers who may arrive looking for a spiritual home?

**Rev. Kathy:**
It is an act of courage to show up as a new person on Sunday morning. It usually takes a little time to sort out whether this church or another one is going to be your spiritual home. Ours is also a congregation filled with all kinds of people. Some may be too shy to greet you while others are so eager to meet you and share their experience of Unitarian Universalism that it can be overwhelming at first. Hang in there, come to worship at least four times before deciding whether to stay or try somewhere else. Be brave, introduce yourself and attend some of our programs, read and learn about this church and Unitarian Universalism, review our membership expectations. Our intention is to offer you an open and affirming place to explore your religious questions, to receive support for your spiritual and personal journey, and to help you find a way to put your own unique gifts into the service of life.

**Question:**
What is your typical week like?

**Rev. Kathy:**
Well, some people still think I only work on Sundays! But truth is, ministry is nearly all consuming. It influences all aspects of my life personal and professional. In practical terms, I start my day at 5:30 am with spiritual practice and end my day with it at 10 pm. My weekdays include a few hours off usually between 3-6 to attend to my family, and parent my two school age children. No week is typical, although there are discernable patterns. I spend nearly half of my week preparing for worship. The rest of the week is spent in meetings with staff, lay and/or community leaders. Responding to pastoral or programmatic emergencies and concerns, communications via email or phone can be significant at any given time. Because we serve over 500 adults and children we are called a program size church or a multi-celled church which means that most of my direct ministry is with leadership and staff. Except for life passages, weddings, memorial services and such, most of the 1:1 pastoral care is done by our pastoral associates and chaplains. My Sabbath day is Friday. I also try to cluster days off throughout the year since there are many weeks when a day off is not possible. It's an intense schedule to be sure, mostly rewarding, deeply meaningful, and sometimes exhausting.

**Question:**
What are your sources of spiritual inspiration?

**Rev. Kathy:**
My children are my greatest spiritual teachers right now. Their sense of spontaneity and play, their ability to be in the now, to expose the truth of things in an instant are never ending sources of revelation and personal growth. My garden comes next, beauty and encounters with nature are essential elements of the holy. Our rich historical religious tradition is another wellspring of inspiration -- especially the writings of the Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David
Thoreau. My social values are grounded in ecofeminism, and my spiritual practices are inspired by philosophical Taoism, classical Buddhism and Hinduism.

**Question:**
What do you like most about being a minister at the Oakland church?

**Rev. Kathy:**
Being with the people. This is a congregation full of high spirited, dedicated, caring, interesting people. Our collective commitment to making Unitarian Universalism a major world religion is inspirational. A surprising number of us are unafraid to take the risks necessary to do the deep transformational work to make lasting and meaningful change in the world. The congregation also has a great sense of adventure and humor. It’s a fun place to be for me and my family.

**Question:**
Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

**Rev. Kathy:**
Just this. I hope if you are someone looking for a spiritual home that you will consider the Oakland church or one of our other Unitarian Universalist congregations as one of your options. And that in doing so you may come to know and experience Unitarian Universalism as the kind of life transforming religion that it is.