

Dear Ones, All;

It is time for me to retire. I have asked the Board to be released from your Call and Covenant effective August 2, 2016. I want to be more present to my own family. And I need a more sustainable and less demanding pace for myself.

When I came in 2008, you all had already made the wise move from Washtenaw Avenue to Ann Arbor Saline Road. You had taken the bold and faithful step to build our beautiful Spiritual Growth and Development wing. In our time together, I believe we have made true progress toward establishing structural foundations that will hold steady this Congregation for many decades into the future.

Together we have seen many successes. Excellence in the worship arts..., paying down the mortgage, major structural repairs, capital replacement plan..., and our 150th Anniversary Celebration that successfully brought our past alive and laid the ground work for planning into our future. Plans are emerging for a Council of Ministries that will empower communications and collaboration for all our efforts. And we are learning how to move forward both sustainably and affordably. Of particular note is the warm satisfaction I take in realizing that the culture of our congregational meetings., the tone, the tenor, have stabilized in a "new normal" that reflects the character and grace of the members of our Congregation.

No ministry is ever without disappointments. Mine include our faltering efforts to create an on-going structure for pastoral care and pastoral associates. Years of effort have fallen apart in a few short months. Personal disappointments recognize that administrative tasks relentlessly eclipsed my availability for teaching and for working with interns. We have yet to find a way to embrace how the expectations for the Senior Minister changed along with the governance changes of June 2008. And we fell short in recognizing that sabbatical is not intended for a minister alone. It is not extended study leave for clergy. We never managed to convey that sabbatical is as important for a congregation to engage as it is necessary for the nurturance of a ministry.

Time and again, I heard this refrain as we explored our 150th Anniversary..., ministers come and go. Congregations are what can remain present over time. The First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor is vibrant. All your hard work has, literally, made it possible to pave the parking lot. All your hard work has, metaphorically, paved a broad pathway toward a strong future. Now, I believe, it is time for UUAA to clarify its mission, to discover what it cares about most.

More than any other thing, I am grateful to have had the honor of serving such a lively congregation with some of the finest lay leaders I have ever known. I count myself truly blessed to be one among the twelve senior ministers who have served this Congregation. Even as I am feeling sadness for the beginning of this leaving, I am also feeling satisfaction and hope. I am keenly aware that UUAA is at the dawning of a robust future.

In our first Sunday together we sang the words, "you can change the world with your love." Having walked with the members of this Congregation for nearly eight years I believe this now, today, more than ever before. I have seen the power of love in this place. I am a better person for these years together. There is one more thing I know with certainty: Love Abides. I have loved this Congregation with the fullness of my heart. And love abides.

May it ever be so. Love Abides.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gail", written in a cursive style.

Rev. Gail Ruth Geisenhainer,
February 29, 2016

