

From Sandra's Study
Rev. Sandra Fees

When Joanna told me she was resigning as our Director of Religious Education, I told her I wasn't sure I knew how to do "this" without her. By "this," I meant being the minister of this church. The words kind of slipped out of my mouth before I could stop myself. I wasn't trying to flatter her or make her feel bad. I just couldn't imagine it.

You see, Joanna was already here as DRE when I arrived. She had been in the position for a year. She was a longtime member of the church who knew the congregation in ways I simply couldn't when I first arrived. She welcomed me with warmth and openness. At our first meeting, she gave me the gift of a volume of chalice lighting readings. Inside she wrote: "To Sandra at the beginning of your ministry. With best wishes." Doesn't that sound just like Joanna?

Over the past few years, my respect and admiration for Joanna have grown. Her leadership has been instrumental in the growth of our RE program. Her commitment to the children, youth, and families of the congregation is unmistakable. While that may have been Joanna's focus and priority, her work extended well beyond that and has contributed to the spiritual lives of the entire community and to our UU faith more broadly. Her work has been remarkable. She deserves and I believe has our gratitude for the amazing work she has done.

But there's something else. Joanna leaving is the loss not only of our beloved DRE but for me also the loss of a valued colleague. At the end of this month, when Joanna completes her time as our DRE, she will continue to be a member of the congregation. I look forward to working with her in the future on all kinds of church-related projects.

But I will nevertheless miss her as a colleague. She has been a trusted advisor and a confidante. She and I have laughed and cried together. We have created wonderful services and rituals together. We have shared failures as well as successes. We have been disappointed and surprised. And yes, we have disagreed too. She has been willing to humor, indulge, and trust me even at times when I honestly think she thought my ideas were just a little unlikely. I sometimes felt she was more gracious and more generous of spirit with me than I was with her. It has been in that full range of our experience together that I came fully to trust and depend on and know Joanna as a colleague in the work of ministry. I will miss that relationship especially, and in ways that I am only beginning to fully realize.

We will each in our own way bid farewell to Joanna as our DRE over this next month. Be sure to be at the reception after church on August 24 when we will do that as a community. Even as we say goodbye to her as Director of Religious Education, we do so with a spirit of hope for what Joanna is being called to do with her gifts and talents in other areas of her life. May we do so also with the knowledge that our spiritual community is well-positioned, thanks to her loving care all these years, to move forward building the future. Yours in faith and love,

Warmly,

Sandra

