

Dear Members and Friends of the Washington Unitarian Universalist Church,

As a newly fellowshiped minister with the Unitarian Universalist Association (Sept. 2012) and serving as a Unitarian Universalist Community Minister in Vermont, I am delighted and honored that your minister and Board of Trustees have offered to ordain me this year, and we settled on August 18. Ordination is an acknowledgement of professional ministry which only congregations can offer ministers in our faith. Since, as part of my community ministry, I have been working with Rev. M'ellen Kennedy on the Peace and Unity Bridge project sponsored by this church, and because I know many of you from preaching here and in Barre, Montpelier and St. Johnsbury, it seems natural and appropriate to accept ordination from you.

I've been asked to share an overview of my background: I grew up outside Chicago with multiethnic extended family connections, and was very involved in a fairly liberal Lutheran congregation with lots of music. Just before my teens I left that faith, read about Eastern religions, and began practicing Hatha Yoga and meditating. In high school I served as student leader of the environmental action club and became excited about collaborative justice advocacy. Work on an organic farm inspired my hope for a more egalitarian and simple lifestyle valuing interconnection over consumption. Subsequent work in bookstores showed me the human longing for meaning, connection and compassionate listening. My undergraduate degree deepened my understanding of holism, psychology, counseling, and education. I co-founded a women's sacred ceremony circle and began working with adults in spiritual development. After years of meditation practice and both formal and informal study of Buddhism, I officially took vows as a Buddhist.

When we moved to Cabot, VT, I began attending the Universalist Unitarian Congregation in St. Johnsbury. Through my participation there I quickly felt called to professional ministry in our faith. I took courses in graduate theology at St. Michael's College in Colchester and spent a year as a Chaplain Intern at Fletcher Allen Medical Center Hospital in Burlington for my Clinical Pastoral Education. I completed my seminary degree at Meadville Lombard Theological School, one of our two Unitarian Universalist seminaries, in their modified residency program. As part of my studies, I served as a student minister at my home congregation for eighteen months, and another several years unofficially affiliated with the Montpelier church. Finally, it was my great pleasure to serve a year as intern minister with the Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau, WI.

From summer 2011 to the present, I have been leading worship as guest minister at UU congregations around Vermont, officiating at a few weddings and working on the Peace and Unity Bridge project. Last year I created the website for the Washington congregation and one for Preaching By Heart (another project of Rev. Kennedy and colleague Rev. Stephen Shick). While appreciative of the community ministries with which I am currently engaged, I am hopeful to someday serve as parish minister in one of our Unitarian Universalist congregations.

With affection and in faith, "Laelia" Tawnamaia, M.Div.

