

## Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport

September 30, 2025

*Submitted September 20, 2025*

*1.1.1 Deepened spiritually in worship that guides them in individual and communal responses to the sacred; enriched through expanded religious understanding, and uplifted, sustained and transformed by living out UU principles.*

Board Chair Beth Cliff has invited me to discuss this end and how I foresee enabling it over the course of the congregational year.

Between now and August 14, 2026, I will be lifting up the seven Unitarian Universalist core values that were ratified at the UUA General Assembly in 2023. Specifically, those values are justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, generosity, and love. While the congregation continues to affirm its Eight Principles, I predict that drawing attention to what has been affirmed by our Associational governing body will support members and friends in understanding themselves among hundreds of congregations across the country working toward shared ideals. I hinted at this intention during our Homecoming service, indicating the connection between congregational life here and those seven values. Over the next months, I will highlight these values in sermons and Minister's Messages.

Here are responses to related questions Beth thought might help me share my thinking: (Thank you, Beth!):

How are you and Micah using music to enhance spiritual experience?

Micah and I are both working from the Soul Matters program to which UUWestport is subscribed. In that way, the music is aligned with the theme of the month, even if we've not had a conversation in advance about exactly what music goes with each service. Similarly, the music in Sunday services also coordinates thematically with the Soul Matters Circles meetings, thereby enhancing spiritual experiences within the congregation.

Is Sunday morning THE spiritual learning center, and is that where you're prioritizing? Can we expect more changes in format? What kinds? What the messages are, who is delivering them, when?

I propose that Sunday morning be the entry-point for seekers looking for community, where they can learn about Unitarian Universalism in general and UUWestport in particular. While each Sunday service will be worthwhile for long-time members and friends, my priority is to fortify the "on-ramp" to our tradition so that newcomers return week after week. Some of the changes off the bat include swapping out esoteric terms like "Call to Worship" and "Hymn" in the orders of service for "Opening Words" and "Singing". In the current tumult of American culture, full of strife and uncertainty, I would have Sunday morning be an oasis in the week, a time of refreshment and calm for members, friends, and newcomers alike. The focus is on community and encouragement from the time before the service starts until after coffee hour is over. I would

have joy and uplift be the hallmarks of UUWestport, Sunday mornings and otherwise. There will be guest preachers on the Sundays when I'm away, such as Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons for the High Holy Days earlier this month. This is also a way to bring in wisdom and representation from other faith traditions.

There used to be spiritual messages from the minister once a week. Will you be continuing that?

Composing the weekly Minister's Message has a spot on my to-do list, though in my first month, it wasn't as high as creating our special Homecoming and "Return-to-the-Sanctuary" services, appearing at meetings of committees/groups, meeting weekly with staff, individually and collectively; representing UUWestport at events in the larger community; honoring dinner invitations from members, and; being responsive to members with concerns that require my immediate attention. Look for more Minister's Messages ahead.

What is your approach to Worship Associates in helping you do tasks during the service, and being a sounding board on ideas that you are percolating?

To date, I have worked collaboratively with Worship Associates in putting services together, by welcoming their personal reflections, suggestions for readings, and comfort levels as worship leaders. Prayerfully, I'm striking the balance between meaningful participation for the WAs without requiring an abundance of coordination between us as Sunday approaches.

What is the role of Adult Faith Formation in providing spiritual growth?

Adult Faith Formation provides several opportunities for spiritual growth. For those who enroll in our programs, it gives them a chance to learn about traditions, philosophies, and thinkers to which they might not have had access. They also get to build community and understanding with their fellow participants in a supportive learning environment. For those who lead our programs, they are encouraged to go deeper in their understanding as they grapple with the questions and concerns raised by participants.

Are there other things to provide spiritual support: Blue Holidays, Grief Group, other specialized topics brought on by volunteers?

Yes. For example, one thing I'm looking to offer during the month of October in conjunction with our theme of "Cultivating Compassion" is a weekend Compassionate Communication workshop.

Are there other things that come to mind that you "wish you had time for" but can't do?

If anything, I wish there was more time to do many of the things that are calling for my attention at the skill-level of which I'm capable. I feel constrained by the abundance of requests, details, and expectations that I manage every day with staff and volunteer support available.

Respectfully submitted,

*Carlton*

Rev. Carlton E. Smith