

ONE MINISTRY, TWO MINISTRIES, THREE MINISTRIES, FOUR

Josephine Gould Discourse

given by

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ONE MINISTRY, TWO MINISTRIES, THREE MINISTRIES, FOUR

One potato, two potato, three potato, fourfive potato, six potato, seven potato, MORE. Out goes YOU.

This was always my favourite counting out and choosing up game when I was growing up. You probably remember the way it goes....standing in a circle with hands in front of you, made into fistsyour hand behind your back when it was tapped on the U of YOU. Finally, only one hand was left, the hand of the person become leader.

This was the imagery that almost immediately sprang to mind as an apt analogy as I sought for a title for this discourse on the ministry in honour of Josephine Gould.

One ministry, two ministries, three ministries, four. How many ministries do we have anyway...in any given church or fellowship? The quick answer is that churches have one and fellowships don't have any, except for an occasional visiting preacher...but this is of course far from the truth. Our Unitarian Universalist societies, whatever their size and whatever they are called...church, fellowship, congregation....are as nothing unless everyone takes seriously our shared ministry: our responsibility to minister to each other as individuals, to ourselves in the congregation as a religious institution, to the various components of our association....SLUUD, CUC, and UUA....and to the wider community in the cause of a more humane world. No society hires a minister to do all this alone. Indeed, except for the legal aspects of an agreement between a minister and a congregation, a society does not hire a minister at all, but rather enters into a covenant whereby the professional religious leader, whom we call minister, and the congregation mutually agree to work together on the common task of ministry. This relationship was affirmed in a vote at the October '84 meeting of the UUA board of trustees and reaffirmed by a vote of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association (the UUMA) with these words:

"That the UUA Board of Trustees, recognizing the right of each member society of our Association to the governance of its own affairs, and recognizing the unique blend of professional and spiritual calling embodied in the traditions of the Unitarian and Universalist ministries, does hereby celebrate and affirm the special nature of the relationship which exists between congregation and minister, understanding that:

- a) ministers in fellowship with the Association are each called by a local congregation to work with said congregation to promote the congregation's ministry to its members and the larger community
- b) the minister's relationship with the congregation served transcends that of merely employer and employee and;

eighteen or younger. Wherever there are children and youth, those who serve as teachers, advisors, consultants, directors or coordinators of religious education, are involved in a very vital ministry, the ministry to children and youth.

In the early 1950's, the UUA published in pamphlet form a paper by Sophia Lyon Fahs entitled, "A New Ministry to Children", familiar, I'm sure, to many of you. In it, she proposed more attention to the children in our church schools....more time, better spaces in which to meet, more resources, more attention to how children grow, more professional leadership. She said things like:

We should never be graduated from the church's school.

We must have a more adequate preparation in our theological seminaries of ministers for supervising work with children.

We need more ministers especially trained to minister to children.

Eventually her philosophy led to the establishment in 1967 of certification by the UUA of Directors of Religious Education, a process individuals achieved through independent study....a move which provided some dynamic leadership and creativity for the denomination and individual churches.

Five ministries, six ministries, seven ministries, MORE.

Following General Assembly in Albuquerque in 1980, I found myself with a dilemma. As a certified Director of Religious Education and member of LREDA, the Liberal Religious Education Directors' Association, I had worked very hard for the passage of the UUA by-law which established the Ministry of Religious Education within our denomination. It had required two General Assembly votes, a simple majority in Boston in 1978 and a 2/3 majority in East Lansing in 1979, to pass. For a variety of reasons, it was very controversial. I had worn a MORE (Ministry of Religious Education) button and had given them out, talking with people as I did so of my conviction that the establishment of this ministry would indeed provide MORE for both a local church and the denomination. After the passage of the by-law by a slim margin a special committee had been struck to establish the requirements, the courses of study and the experiences for those wishing to become Ministers of Religious Education, a goal to be achieved through independent study, since our theological schools do not offer sufficient curricula in this field. Those of us previously certified by the denomination as DRE who wished to qualify, would probably have areas of study or experience to be filled in. The requirements are stiff. I sometimes think it is harder to become an MRE than a Parish Minister, though I'm sure I would be debated on this point! The requirements include experience and competence in life span religious education programs in a local church and worship for all ages, child development, psychology, history and philosophy of education, church history, Unitarian and Universalist history and heritage, world

be received into final fellowship with the UUA as a Minister of Religious Education.

One ministry, two ministries, three ministries, four,
Five ministries, six ministries, seven ministries, MORE,
Out goes YOU.

Where am I left and where are we left with the two professional ministries in one church? Do we count out, recognize the validity of all ministries, lay and professional alike, and then when we get to "Out goes YOU", do we have the parish minister still the prime minister? Granted that all parish ministers worthy of the calling recognize and value the various ministries found in the congregation, and that everyone recognizes the covenant of mutuality, must there be a hierarchy within the professional ministry? In remaining true to my calling, did I opt out of equality? Not if some old patterns and attitudes are changed.

The Iroquois chapter of the UUMA was a pioneer in the move toward equality. Long before there were MRE's, this chapter constituted itself as the Iroquois chapter UUMA-LREDA with equal status for all members, and officers chosen from both. My own congregation in Ottawa has taken appropriate steps; our newsletter heading and our newspaper advertisement simply read "ministers", followed by both names in alphabetical order. The agreement between the congregation and both the parish minister and myself, calls us equal colleagues sharing in the total ministry of the church. But this is just on paper. How does it, or can it, work in practice? This is still a struggle for many MRE's, and I know I am more fortunate than some.

So much depends upon what the two ministers do, for congregational attitudes may change somewhat with information about how it "ought" to be, but will only change appreciably if the behaviour is suitably modelled.

As a Minister of Religious Education, I concentrate on children and youth and their families. If this is all I'm seen doing; if all my sermons are about religious education; if the only committee meetings I attend are those relating to religious growth and development for children, youth, and adults; if my only participation at a family service is to do something with the younger children and then take them out for their own programme while the parish minister preaches, then I am limiting my ministry, and my congregation is the poorer for it. These things constitute my main task, and they are what I am especially needed for, but I do MORE. Perhaps two times a year, I preach a sermon that has nothing to do with religious education per se. I can be the prophetic preacher if I wish. The hospital calls I make are fewer than the parish minister's, but they are not limited to church school children and their families. The same is true of counselling. My particular committee responsibilities are Religious Education and Adult programs, but I also attend Worship, Denominational Affairs, and Long Range Planning....and sometimes Property and others. I serve the whole church. I am a minister particularly to children, but I am also one of the church's ministers.

As a religious people, we do not wish to disvalue anyone. The ministry OF all of us is TO all of us, children, youth, adults, alike. We are fortunate as a denomination that we have designated both a parish ministry with its rich and dynamic preaching heritage and a ministry of religious education with its emphasis on life span religious growth. It is up to us as Unitarian Universalists to use these two ministries wisely, to not set them apart from each other. but to let them become part of the whole. My wish would be that as congregations covenant with each minister to share in that ministry, that wherever there are the two professional ministries serving one church, they covenant with each other to share in the total ministry of the church, and make it work.

RESPONSE TO PEG GOODING...

Peg's discourse on ministry has touched me very personally, in several areas. As many of you know, my early experience of Unitarianism, and later, of Unitarian Universalism, was profoundly rooted in religious education. Nevertheless, when I decided to study for ministry, it was parish ministry and many of the issues in that choice, Peg has described. And of course, the personal touching reaches out to me in my own very specialized ministry, and I recognize some of our shared feelings though the differences are clear as regards the character of our two ministries.

Peg suggests that the ministry of the religious educator is a "vital ministry," perhaps even more difficult to achieve than that of the parish minister, and of her conviction that the establishment of the MRE classification would enrich both local congregations and the denomination. But she goes on to express the concerns I have heard over the years when she speaks of wanting "to be a 'real' minister," of equality, of the questionable status of those who are recipients of the major portion of the religious educator's ministry -- our children.

It grieves me to think of the numerous occasions when I have heard my colleagues -- at conferences in churches -- attack professional religious educators. Their comments are usually directed at the status which has been extended to those "baby sitters," or "Sunday School teachers." And Peg is accurate in her perceptions about the reasons for such an attitude. Most professional religious educators are women (there is a strangely familiar ring to that rhetoric which suggests that R.E. people should know their place and stay in it!), and our parish ministers, with the support of most of us, have bought into the traditional (and limited) ministerial role in the congregation.

After twenty years, I should be used to it, and in a way I guess I can find some humor in our perception of ourselves as so radically different from our sister churches in other denominations -- while we cling to the same models they do! With some frustration, I will say that part of the reason that many of our congregations continue to have what Peg calls a primary or a "prime" minister -- with the minister of religion in a secondary role -- is probably a problem of the M.R.E.'s. There is an authority and/or power which pertains to ministry which some do not acknowledge or appropriate. While that is frustrating, there is much to be celebrated in Peg's description of the shared ministry in a congregation which has learned to nurture and appreciate the wealth it shares with two professional equals in leadership positions.

Specialization is vital to ministry as it is to medicine -- though holding different implications (I have no problem with a minister of religious education providing a prophetic sermon, counselling, etc. -- but I do not want my gynecologist to remove my brain tumor!). But as Peg said, no congregation calls a minister to be all things -- (I'm afraid some still do, Peg!) -- but hopefully, most of us recognize our skills and our areas of weakness (at least of lesser skill) -- so it becomes vital to the health of our ministry, our congregations, and our religious faith that we confront and engage our traditional concept of ministry.

So, Peg, I thank you for your discourse -- it speaks to us as ministers, one to another, professionals and lay persons. It calls us, I believe, to honour those gifts of the Spirit which each of us has. It calls upon those of us who are professional ministers to honour the enrichment which specialized ministry of religious education brings to our congregations. We are learning, but old models -- hierarchical, paternalistic, and so on -- still linger, if not in our heads, in our guts!

As I hear you calling upon Ministers of Religious Education to grasp the authority which has so long resided somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the pulpit, and to do with it what Religious Educators do better than anyone -- to help the members of the church to discover, identify and celebrate the authority of ministry which exists in each of us as we minister to one another; at the same time I hear you calling upon all of us who are professional ministers to become religious educators -- to educate our colleagues and congregations -- to work towards a radical new image of ministry which is inclusive and universal, in which the rhetorical ideal becomes a reality.

Barb Kulcher

Sometimes parish ministers say, "Now that we have a Minister of Religious Education, I don't have to worry about that aspect of the programme anymore." Not so. In the same way that the MRE is to some degree everyone's minister, so is the parish minister also the children's. The story told in the main church on Sunday morning while the children are there, is not enough to cement that relationship. My own memories of growing up Universalist include the participation of the Rev. Clarence B. Etsler at our Sunday school worship services, and occasionally with our classes, often with the YPCU, the Young People's Christian Union, as the youth group was called back then. This was easier in those days because in my small town, Sunday school was at 10:00 and church at 11:00. Nevertheless, I have experienced, both in Phoenix and in Ottawa, parish ministers who arranged schedules so that children could visit them in their studies, so that they could lead children's worship services that are separate from adults', so that they could visit classes and go on field trips. Our conversations concerned with the health of the church have included, not excluded, the children's programmes. For the most part, parish ministers I have worked with have been ministers to the children and youth as well as to the adults. It is all a matter of degree.

Some time ago, Meadville/Lombard Theological School devoted an issue of its new bulletin to controversy over leadership roles.... specifically parish minister and MRE. Two quotes from this seem particularly apt in closing.

The Reverend Nancy Doughty was at that time both parish minister and MRE at Grosse Pointe, Michigan:

"Basically, I don't think that the ministry of religious education differs that much from parish ministry. For some congregations, there may be some confusion about the role of the ordained minister of religious education. The ordained minister of religious education has indicated his or her particular interest in that given area, but he or she is also qualified for all other aspects of ministry."

The Rev. Jerry Wright was at that time co-minister at First Unitarian in Nashville, Tennessee:

"A truly collegial relationship between the parish minister and the minister of religious education gives a whole new message to the congregation. When both ministers are involved with religious education, it indicates to the congregation that they both value children. When the minister who preaches in church on Sunday is made to be such a big deal, what does that say about the one who works with the kids? Who, then, would want to work with the disvalued children?"

religions, sociology, public speaking, theology, the Judeo-Christian Bible, and Clinical Pastoral Education, as well as evidence of having covered the lengthy Fellowship Committee reading list.

I had no quarrel with the requirements. That standards of education for the ministry must be high, I fully support.

What happened to me in Albuquerque was that I was urged to apply to appear in the fall before the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee for preliminary fellowship as an MRE. The dilemma for me was, should I do this, or study for the parish ministry? You see, the calling for the ministry was very strong in me and I wanted to be a "real" minister. I knew I would bring "MORE" to my congregation and the denomination as an MRE...in the realm of added knowledge rather than practice, for I was already preaching, teaching and leading worship services for all ages, counselling, working with several committees...and as a chaplain under the CUC guidelines, I had been marrying and burying for several years. But would this ministry be equal to the parish ministry in any eyes but mine? History and experience had taught me that as a culture we do not put a very high value on the caretakers of our children, especially the youngest (you only have to look at the remuneration day care workers receive to know this), and these caretakers are usually women. Religious Education has customarily been associated primarily with children and more closely with women than with men. I had also noted that many of the women I knew who had been Directors of Religious Education and then become parish ministers, had steered clear of the church school, no matter how much adult religious education they did. Not all, but many. So maybe if I wanted equality in the ministry, I needed to study for the parish ministry, as indeed I had been encouraged by some colleagues to do.

BUT, then there were the children. You see, I know full well that one of the great strengths of my calling is the ministry to children, in all that Sophia Fahs implied and Josephine Gould exemplified. So which way was I to go? If I went for the parish ministry, would I feel I was betraying the children and myself, even though I worked to spend as much time as possible with the children? If I went for the ministry of religious education, was I betraying my feminism and saying, "equality be damned!"?

I took my problem to the desert and there, a trusted colleague, a male parish minister, asked me the pertinent question: "If you, who have given so much to religious education and are still so active and interested, leave it, what will that say to others about the ministry of religious education?" There was no longer any question in my mind. I owed it to others and myself to stay a religious educator. I have no regrets about this decision.

And so, I appeared before the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee and was received into preliminary fellowship as an MRE. I have worked hard on my particular contingencies with courses in pastoral counselling, theology, and Bible (flunking an oral exegesis of the fifth chapter of Genesis), and independent study with mentors in church history and world religions, and at General Assembly in Atlanta, will

- c) the minister's function is to work cooperatively with the congregation to serve mutually the goals of that society in the service of liberal religion, and covenant together to define the mutual responsibilities of congregation and minister to each other."

What can we expect of this minister, the professional religious leader? In a fellowship or small church without a permanent minister, this usually becomes very specific, for we choose carefully what we want him or her to do; usually a sermon on a Sunday morning with perhaps a discussion following. As we move further into the eighties with our goals of growth and reaffirmation, this takes an encouraging turn, for it often goes beyond the Sunday morning preaching to include Sunday afternoon workshops, a weekend ministry, other opportunities for a shared ministry.

Where there is a permanent minister, called by the congregation, the process has been gone through with the UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association) department of the ministry, whereby a thorough search has been made and there is a good match between minister and congregation, at least theoretically. We all know there are sometimes surprises on both sides, but these are not intentional. The match usually work if the covenant is honoured....if as well as periodic evaluations of the minister, the congregation also evaluates itself. What goals have committees set? What responsibilities belong to committees and boards? Has anything prevented the minister from performing as hoped? If we didn't want the minister to be an administrator, have we provided appropriate paid or volunteer administrative staff? Are they valued and if this is paid staff, is their remuneration adequate so that they know without a doubt how important is their particular ministry to the church? If we want the minister to be a social activist, is there sufficient dedicated support so that he or she isn't standing alone on Parliament Hill, at the State Capital? And are we allowing the minister the human right to imperfection, finding someone else to take on tasks the minister doesn't do well? For two years, money collected for UNICEF by our school children stayed hidden away in my office because I couldn't seem to get around to taking it to the bank. I am not good at getting to the bank, even on pay day! In spite of my embarrassment, I needed to say to the Religious Education Committee, "I really can't take the responsibility for getting this money to the bank." And so we changed the system, and now UNICEF money no longer stays hidden in mysterious places in my office, with the guilt hanging over my head and the money not being used. Minister and committee share a ministerial task of outreach.

Members of a congregation minister to each other and to the ministerial staff in many ways, beginning with helping each other, encouraging each other to grow, working together on tasks. Music is a ministry, so is the book table, a social event, and all that goes on in the church or fellowship, including the religious education of children.

I don't know how it is in your society, but in the congregation I serve fully a third of the people present on a Sunday morning are

