**Wake Now My Vision**

**Rev. Diane Rollert**

**Unitarian Church of Montreal, 15 December 2019**

When I was younger, I never imagined that I’d become a minister. I never saw a vision of myself as a leader. Like many young people, I was afraid to have a voice. In some ways, I stumbled into this vocation. I’ve often joked that God kept calling me into the ministry, and I kept saying, “You’ve got the wrong number.”

I believe that all of us are called in different ways to serve in this world. Each of us is called to minister, to attend to, or to care for something beyond ourselves. We don’t always hear the call. We don’t always understand its language, and we can have a hard time envisioning what theologian Frederick Buechner calls “the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

Although my call to ministry really began when I became a religious educator 22 years ago, the Unitarian Church of Montreal is my first ministry, where I serve as the official minister and leader of a congregation. This is year fourteen, and I have no intention of serving any other congregation in the future. You are my home.

Earlier in November, I spoke to you about how our vision statement is a covenant we share. It’s hard to believe that it’s been 11 years since these words were literally unfurled in this sanctuary. How many of you were here the day that the words of our vision were released on long paper banners behind me on the chancel here?

*As a spiritual community,*

*we welcome and nurture,*

*we inspire and challenge,*

*we take action in the world.*

These were the four banners that ultimately inspired the cloth banners now hanging in the back of the sanctuary.

After all these years, this vision still remains central to who we are. These fourteen words represent a deep aspiration we share of how we can be in community together.

Daniel (our guest from Germany) spoke of earlier of his lament that his own vision of taking a sabbatical in Montreal will come to an end someday in the near future. Yet I know that the experience he and his family have shared here in this city will remain a part of who they are, even as they return to their former lives in Germany. It’s a similar story for us as a community. The vision we share today will become part of what defines this congregation far into the future, long after we are all gone.

*“As a spiritual community…”*

Being a spiritual, religious community in an increasingly non-spiritual, non-religious society, is why I am here. I became a minister because I am always searching for something transcendent and luminous that I can never fully explain. Yet I find it every day, even when I get caught up in the mundane administration of things. (They never tell you in seminary how much administration there is at the heart of ministry.)

There’s something in the beauty and the energy, the living and the dying, of being human, that continually connects us to something greater. We are more than a social gathering. We are more than a social justice meeting or a board meeting. Concrete work has to get done, but there is something that calls us to be more. We are a spiritual community. This is what lies at the heart of the worship services we celebrate together each Sunday. This is what speaks to our hearts as we see the flames reflected in each other’s eyes as we pass candles from hand to hand each week during our meditation.

“*To welcome and nurture, inspire and challenge…”*

They say that every preacher really has only one sermon. We just keep repeating variations on the same theme. Mine is simply this: we have to lovingly make space for all our differences, no matter what our individual beliefs or identities may be. There is always room for all of us here, whether we are atheists, agnostics, theists or spiritual seekers, and no matter what our social, ethnic, racial differences or sexual orientation or gender expressions may be. This is the welcoming, nurturing, inspiring, challenging, pushing, testing, learning and growing that we have to do together. Because if we can’t do it here, what hope can we possibly have for the world? We have to keep trying, over and over again, to get better at being in diverse community together.

Three weeks ago, we had an historic vote about the amount of money our By Laws could allow us to withdraw from our endowment funds. This was no small matter. Many years ago, we lost our previous building to a major fire and this congregation rose like the Phoenix out of the ashes to buy this land, build this building and wisely set aside an endowment for a future rainy day. Since then, we have lived through ups and downs, and have emerged with tremendous abundance.

It was an act of trust, out of a belief in our future selves, that our members voted 60 to 7 to increase the ability to take from the endowment in order to ensure that our staff are treated fairly and justly. At the same time, those gathered for that special business meeting made a pledge to truly live into our vision, to become more actively engaged, to focus on welcoming and nurturing newcomers as well as our members and friends, of continuing to inspire and challenge each other to go deeper in this faith we share.

To the 7 who voted against the motion, I want to say that I recognize how much you deeply care about our future. We will count on you to keep us honest and prudent.

Our vision is our covenant, a sacred promise that we project into the future together. It’s the legacy we leave for the future generations who will inherit this place.

“*Take action in the world…”*

To take action in the world, we need to open our hearts to each other and to the places where we can truly make a difference, to use our abundance to fulfill our vision. The more we do so, the more we will strengthen this spiritual community we share.

I invite you imagine coming with me to top of Mount Royal to look out across the horizon. As I stand there, I see a congregation that continues to sponsor refugees because the world is too full of people looking for a safe home. I see a congregation that partners with a Unitarian Universalist congregation in a small village in the Philippines because connecting with UUs across the ocean will be a lifeline for both of us. I see a congregation that engages in beloved conversations about racism. I see a congregation that shares in truth, healing, reconciliation and reflection with our Indigenous neighbours.

I see a congregation that finds celebration and solace in music, in worship, in the milestones of our individual lives and in the holidays and holy days that mark our years together. I see a congregation that takes loving care of its children and their families in complex and stressful times. I see a congregation that feeds the hungry and rejoices in breaking bread together. I see a congregation that renews its commitment to being a Green Sanctuary, and responsibly searches for truth and meaning together. I see a people encouraging each other to work towards trust and goodness in a world where there is so much darkness.

Many years ago, on my first-ever Sunday here, I shared these words from Rainer Marie Rilke:

*My eyes already touch the sunny hill*

*Going far ahead of the road I have begun.*

*So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp.*

*It has its inner light, even from a distance…*

The inner light of this community called me then and continues to call me now. I have faith in the road that lies ahead. Out on that distant hill is the deep gladness that meets the deep hunger of the world. Won’t you come meet me there…