

The Road goes ever on and on
Rev. Linda Thomson
First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto
Sunday, May 3, 2026

We gather today, observing, albeit a bit early, Earth Day. We are held by a planet

I can't tell you how many times during the 9 days that Rev. Alex was here, candidating, with you, that I wished I could have been a fly on the wall. You see, I'd already met him, online and in person, and I was quite taken with his skill as a communicator, his insightful questions and his commitment to helping Unitarian Universalist communities thrive. From everything I've heard last Sunday's meeting was joyful and moving. I wanted to share your excitement. After the long road, to this moment, a decision to sell the old building, meeting online during the pandemic, in rented space at Oakwood Collegiate, Rev. Shawn's decision to move to Vancouver, and more time online as delays in construction at this site, seemed daunting – this moment feels like a big deal. But is it? It will be a VERY good day when August rolls around and Rev. Alex begins work as your minister. People are working now, in a variety of ways to make that moment possible, and I want each and every one of them to that I appreciate the effort. And yet, here we are today. Rev. Alex has gone back to Michigan, and his start date is three months away... it feels a like a bit of an anticlimax. But is it? We know, don't we, that the stuff of life is in the day to day. Sure, there are the BIG moments – but they are not, by any means, most of the moments. Most of the moments can, if we let them, slide by, without much notice. But they matter. They matter a lot. A life is made day by day, moment by moment, choices. So this is not the day to say, 'lets all take a breath, and wait until August, when Rev. Alex starts, and we can really begin our future'. Because today is here, now. Sure, it isn't as glamorous as some days, but it is today, and the life of this congregation is made in the day by day, moment by moment choices we make.

What each of us does today, and tomorrow, and every day now until the next BIG moment is what really matters, what will shape our individual lives and that of our collective, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, life.

Today we celebrated four people who have chosen to formally join the congregation. I want you all to be reminded, that you need not formally join, to be a contributing and beloved member of this community. But only those who have formally joined are able to vote, to have a Rite of Passage performed by a minister. Some choose to become members and other are happy to belong without formal membership. For those that have formally joined, either today or earlier, it may or not have felt like a big moment, but it is, nonetheless, a moment. You've declared, in a distinct way, that you are one of us, and that you are adding

your effort to ours – to share our values, to connect with this community of faith, so that together we can challenge and love one another into lives of integrity, accountability and meaning. That is no small thing.

I've shared with you before some of my story of my Unitarian Universalist Road to today. I walked into a congregation, with my spouse and our two children, five and three years old. Among other things I remember the feeling of being able to be in a room of people without taking care of my kids or doing my job. For that one hour each week, I felt that my family was being taken care of. In time, as the kids got a bit older, I began saying yes to some of the opportunities to contribute that came my way. Helping to set up coffee on Sunday morning, taking my turn supervising a class of children, bringing a dish to a community dinner. But in times my relationship with the congregation changed, I began to understand it as something that I was a co-creator of. My relationship with it shifted from that of a consumer. In time my relationship with the congregation changed, and I found myself changing too. It amuses me sometimes to think about the changes that have happened, day by day, moment by moment – mostly when I wasn't even aware that change was happening. I truly believe my engagement with our faith tradition, our faith tradition, imperfect as it is – after all it is formed and shaped by humans – has influenced the way I've parented, shopped, gardened, and the way I've been a partner in my marriage. I am not sure that the values we talk about in our congregations, the ways we challenge one another, and ask important questions have left much of me unchanged. Even on the days I didn't recognize it, I was each day and each moment taking a particular path, a branch on the road, one I might not have otherwise even noticed. I am profoundly grateful for what I've been given and for what has been asked of me.

What about you, have you found yourself surprised or amused by some of the twist and turns that Unitarian Universalism has presented you with. How has your life been changed or enriched by the encounter?...

Many people tell me that they've felt affirmed by others, and so have found themselves taking on roles, saying yes to things they might not have imagined... have you learned new skills, tried different things, taken on roles that you didn't anticipate?...

My life has been enriched, I've had the opportunity to meet good and careful people, some who have been mentors, some who have companioned me during days and weeks of great loss, and days of celebration, and more importantly, to the days and moments in between. In what ways has your association with this congregation and Unitarian Universalism helped you become more grounded, or more fully yourself?...

I was somewhat surprised, as someone who'd left formal religion, to find myself falling in love with a tradition with branching roots. I remember being at a workshop sometime in the early 1990's when the workshop leader declared Unitarian Universalism could offer salvation. WHAT?! And then, a smile on his face, he explained that salvation came from the same root as salve. Something that soothes wounds, that helps to heal. I was hooked. Salvation – healing in World that needs healing, healing people that need, as we all do, healing, offering care, so that each of us was better equipped to live with care and compassion, even as others that offered it to me, those were things I believed in. I know I've shared before my belief that what we do here is offer sanctuary and springboard.

Today is the final Sunday of our annual Generosity Campaign. Quite a few of you have already shared with us what your annual financial commitment to the congregation will be. Thank you. Some of you've we've not heard from yet – no problem, it isn't too late to share your plans. If you've not pledged, you can expect someone to reach out in the week or so. This is one of those moments. Maybe not a big moment, but maybe it is. As we rest on the threshold of the future of the congregation, the coming of a new minister, it is a good time to ask, 'who am I?', 'why does this congregation matter to me', and 'what would be missing in your life, this community, this city if we went away, or failed to thrive?' The reality is that we made a bold move in coming to this place, more accessible, in a neighbourhood that better reflects the diversity of Toronto, and we made an investment in our future. Now is the time for us to strengthen our financial base, so that we can continue to change lives and that changed lives can be a force for good in the world. Again, if you've already pledged, thank you. If you've not yet pledged, you still can. Either way, I encourage some reflection. Can I do a bit more, dig a bit deeper? Your generosity matters.

I invite us to pause here so that we can sing together

Please join me in singing Hymn #155 *Circle 'Round for Freedom*.

We are already here. We've found our way to this congregation. Some have been here a long time, others barely arrived, but if you have, like I have, found something of value, something that encourages you to take your values into the world, you'll agree with me – this is not the time to hesitate. If you'd found the cure for the common cold, it would be life changing, and I think you'd agree that your discovery had the potential to make other lives better. Wouldn't that discovery come with a responsibility – to share it, to ensure others could benefit? And isn't that true of this life affirming tradition and this community? Each of us, has the capacity to help make the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto and even greater force for good.

Somewhere along my Unitarian Universalist Road, I fell in love with our faith and its potential. I grew, I was challenged, I was asked questions about the meaning of my life and what kind of world I wanted to help cocreate. I decided that the values and tradition that asked more of me needed more of me. More of my time, more of my skills, and more of my money. I'm not saying all of us need to decide to jump quite as fully as I have, but this is not a passive faith. Years ago, someone asked me if ours wasn't an easy faith, "after all, you get to believe what you want about the big questions". "Not very demanding" they assumed. However, after 40 plus years of engagement, I've decided it is more demanding. We are not going to give you the answer. Each of us has work to do. Each of us has to decide what it means, and what it takes for us to be here, and what it takes for us to live our commitment and values in the world.

When you leave here today, you'll be offered an envelope. I want every person, not just every household to take one. Inside your envelope you'll find either a card, with a suggestion for an act of kindness or a small sum of money. These are not gifts for you to keep, but invitations—to create a blessing in the world. Use what you find in your envelope, to live our values in the world. Perhaps your envelope has enough money to buy coffee for a lonely friend, or to drop in the 'send a kid to camp' bucket at the coffee shop, or to pass on to someone asking for help at your street corner... you get to decide. I ask that you do this in the next week or so. Some envelopes have suggestions on things to do, 'listen without interrupting, answering a call to justice and equity, and more – there are 20 different possibilities. Matt will drop some suggestions into the chat, for those online. Let's pause now, take a breath. Let's think about the impact, that will flow from this community as each of us, takes up the challenge your envelope presents to you. I like to think about the ripples of goodness, of affection, of care for the world that will flow from today. This envelope activity is intended to help us all imagine the ways in which this congregation is part of the interdependent web.

We know, don't we, that the stuff of life is in the day to day. Sure, there are the BIG moments – but they are not, by any means, most of the moments. But they matter. They matter a lot. A life is made day by day, moment by moment, choices. Today is our reminder to imagine the ways we can meet this moment. As you get ready to welcome Rev. Alex this summer, there is still justice to be made, joy to be found, care to be extended. This congregation asks each of us to make choices. May the choices we make, moment by moment reflect the care and esteem we have for one another, and our hopes for the world.

Each envelope is like a small pebble tossed gently into the pond. May ripples of goodness spread from this place and this time. In the days ahead, may we each carry this small charge beyond these walls.