

One More Thing
Rev. Linda Thomson
First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto
Sunday, September 6, 2026

Some of you may remember the TV show Columbo that ran for 7 years in the 1970's. A Homicide detective, Lieutenant Columbo, played by Peter Falk, was a seemingly scattered fellow. He had a somewhat bumbling manner, wore a rumpled trench coat, sometime had the stub of a cigar in his mouth - and in every episode there was a "One More Thing" moment that occurred just as he was about to leave. He'd stop, look thoughtful, and then ask the person he was interviewing one final question - one they weren't expecting...

Then, more than 20 years later, Steve Jobs, used the same strategy during his presentations. First, he'd provide an update and then, as the time was running out, he'd circle back with his "One More Thing" line, providing an exciting announcement. It became part of his bit, and audiences knew it was coming, wondering what new technology they were going to learn about.

Now, I'm not a Homicide Detective, I don't have a cigar. I'm no tech guru, I'm not a business savvy investor. I'm just a soon to be, mostly retired, minister. But, today, I want to, after 36 times sharing services, offer my "One More Thing" reflections. It's my chance to highlight some of the things I think have been most important about our time together, but it also my chance to ensure I don't leave important things unsaid. Today is me reflecting to you what I've learned about you and offering those as lessons - you can take them or leave them, for the next phase in the life of the congregation. Because, you know, people assume that a minister is a teacher, someone with answers. I might actually know some things. I probably have some wisdom. I've studied theology and pastoral care and made a career with the Canadian Unitarian Council - before I came here - of understanding organizational development. I don't want to discount those things, but at the heart of it, I believe that ministry is about being a companion, a listener, and an observer, more than being a teacher. I feel we've been on a great adventure together, one I am profoundly grateful for, and I've got some thoughts to share before I take my leave.

I think I already knew this about you, but I've come to know it more deeply. You are good people. From my vantage point I can see clearly that this is true. You are not perfect people. You don't always get it right, sometimes you disagree and sometimes you hurt one another. That is because you are people. Humans make mistakes. You make mistakes. But I have seen good people, who do what they can to support one another, to

circle back around when things have gotten off track. I've come to know you as people who are, each in their own way, trying to make the world a little better – whether that is a member of the coffee team, the spiritual care team, the board, one of the social justice teams, or as someone who says hello to the person beside you here on Sunday morning or on the streetcar, you are trying to be decent humans. That is a lot! You are good people, and I don't mean that in a sappy Hallmark-card kind of way. I've been given a front row seat, and I have watched you. I've listened to you. I've seen what you do when nobody is applauding. And I have come to believe that, fundamentally, you are people who are trying to live lives of conscience and compassion. It has been my privilege to be part of this community.

I want you to know that you've changed me. As I said, people often think that the minister is the teacher. Sometimes they probably are. But I want you to know you've been teachers for me.

In the past 6 years you've been through a lot; A pandemic, the departure of a much-loved minister, rental spaces, on-line, and unanticipated delays in the completion of this space and more ministerial transitions. And through it all – you've still been, well, you've been you – and it seems to me, the best version of you. You've been incredibly resilient, taking each set back you faced with more grace than I might have expected. There have been a lot of decisions to make along the way and in the past year. You've shown trust in your leaders, and you've had important conversations when you needed to have them. Your move to this building, at this address showed foresight and commitment to the values that have been historic touchstones for the congregation. Your history as a social justice minded congregation – advocating for civil rights, peace, LGBTQ+ rights and interfaith dialogue – meant you didn't shy away from being you, in a different part of the city. During challenging times, it is sometimes easy to want to hunker down, to stick with the people and patterns you know best. You've not done that. You've remembered who you were, even when the quiet comfortable patterns you'd established were 'enlivened' by the addition of children – even children who have been at times, as children are, a bit rambunctious. Sitting and talking to people you already know, and who already know you can be comfortable. But that's not what I've seen. Each week, I've seen people turn in their chairs, reach out a hand, and introduce themselves to someone who has found their way here – you've been hospitable. And, oh my goodness, I've seen your good hearts, showing up for one another, caring for one another, through illness, personal struggles and death. I won't say that your complicated journey hasn't changed you – I hope it has – but what I know is that it has not diminished you.

So, you've taught me, reminded me, that hard times don't have to mean retreat, or crankiness or a smaller vision. Thank you for being such good teachers!

Given your recent history, I don't think you really need me to tell you this, but I do want to remind you that the congregation and the minister are not the same thing. Interim Lead Minister is the title I've used this past year. Interim, or in-between, has defined my time with you. Many of you have taken the time to thank me, to tell me I'll be missed. Thank you for sharing that – but we knew, we knew didn't we, that I wasn't going to be in the role for a long time. But there is another truth, one that may not always seem obvious in a congregation that has, for the most part, enjoyed long-tenured ministries – here it is, Ministers come and go. All ministers are, at some level, interim ministers. The congregation is the thing. So, to with programs and buildings and people. Things change, but for 181 years, this congregation has been an important to the lives of more people than we can know. Your message of justice, care, free inquiry and religious exploration is still the thing that matters. You have a new minister, and I'm so pleased for him and for you. I hope you are together for a long time. But remember, the future of this congregation has never depended on one minister. It depends upon you. The question now isn't, 'what kind of minister will Rev. Alex be?', but rather, 'Who will we be together?'

Another bit of parting advice is to stay curious. More than once this past year, I've reminded you that I don't have all the answers. I don't. But on more than one occasion I've asked you some questions. Apparently, I, like Columbo, like asking questions just as I'm about to leave. Here are some I'd like to leave you with. They will be yours to take up or disregard.

- What is it the unique and important work of this congregation? In my previous role, with the Canadian Unitarian Council, I'd ask when helping congregations, that they think about what their next steps should be, "What would the shape of the hole – in the city, in the community and in the lives of the members be – if the congregation closed tomorrow?"
- Who needs this community that hasn't found you yet? Unitarian Universalism, and this congregation are not for everyone, but until everyone who needs the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto has found you, I don't think your work is done.
- What should you hold onto—and what should you be willing to let go? I've said this before, but things change. How can you know? I think remembering to keep asking the questions, will help you do the good work of discernment. What is essential—and what is simply the way we've always done it?
- How will you disagree without losing your love for one another? You are human. Humans have a lot of ideas and a lot of opinions. Sometimes we let our opinions about any number of things, the shape of Sunday services, the hymns that get sung, the right budget priorities – and more, seem more important than the care

you have for one another for the love in this community. It is hard, I know it is hard. Sometimes you will disagree and sometimes people will choose to leave, but the fundamental question is “how can you do that hard work with affection and care?”

- What will you do when the easy thing and the right thing are not the same? Because they aren’t the same sometimes. Sometimes the right thing is to, I don’t know, sell a building you’ve called your congregational home for dozens of years. And those types of decisions aren’t easy. Holding on to the why can guide you as you consider the what.

Now, not one of those questions is much like the sort that Columbo would have asked; his were more along the line of “do you remember what you had for lunch”, or “what time did you wind your watch?” His were much simpler... but at the heart of it, mine are pretty basic too, aren’t they? “What kind of congregation do you want to be?” and “How can you take care of one another?” That’s all really... that’s what I hope you keep asking yourselves. Finally, I’ve seen you take care, of one another this year. Please don’t stop. It is beautiful. This congregation, any community is sustained in the moments when you notice one another, listen to one another. We all want to be seen. We all want to be heard. Doing that for another person is a gift. So, some final lessons - already things you know how to do. Make the phone call, notice who isn’t showing up, welcome the newcomer, forgive and for heavens sake, please make potato salad.

Oh, wait, there is one more thing...

I want you to know that this year has mattered to me. You have mattered to me. I’ve been changed by our time together. I will carry pieces of you with me—your stories, your laughter, your questions, your courage, your imperfections, your kindness. And I hope you will carry a little piece of me with you, too.”

“You are good people. You are not finished. You don’t have to be perfect. You simply have to keep trying to live into the values you proclaim.”

And finally:

I love you. And I am grateful that, for this year, I got to be your minister.

“And now I really am going to go. There won’t be another ‘one more thing’ , because the next thing belongs to you.”

Be curious. Be courageous. Be kind. Take care of one another. And wherever you go, leave a little more love behind you than you found.

Let us take a few deep breaths in silent reflection