

Report from the Task Force to Explore Ordaining Leia

We envision the professional leadership of our church guiding us through a time of reconciliation, revitalizing our loving community, moving us toward fiscal stability, and empowering us to live according to our UU principles and values. We look to our professional leaders to lead with wisdom, dedication, and clarity and to connect to all parts of church life. We want our professional leaders to work as a team, supporting each other in their individual roles, consulting with each other so every aspect of church life receives the benefit of their collective wisdom and coordinating their efforts to provide cohesive leadership. We need professional leadership to guide the internal workings of the church, supporting our committees, listening to our congregation, inspiring us to greater understanding and growth and we need professional leadership to engage in our greater community so our values are represented in Charlottesville.

In our faith tradition, there is a typical path to ordained ministry that includes a Master of Divinity degree and fellowshiping by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association. It is true, and has been true for over 350 years, that local Unitarian Universalist congregations have the ultimate authority to ordain their own clergy. As has been our tradition, congregations are entitled and have the power to identify and call forth those whom they deem to be their minister.

Leia Durland-Jones has been steadfast in her dedication to our church community these last 27 years. With integrity, professionalism and kindness, she is a role model to us all. She lives our UU values in her every word and action. Throughout our congregation's struggles, Leia has provided a thoughtful, calm and wise voice to guide us. She understands our church, our history and our people. She has dedicated her life to our care. Leia has ministered to all of us with her compassion, acceptance of differences, and firm guidance. She has been one of our most valuable ministers. We need her leadership to guide us forward to be the vital community we can be. It is time for our congregation to formally empower Leia as one of our ordained clergy.

How did this task force come to be? Why now?

Over the years, many of us have appreciated all the ministerial work Leia does in addition to all her religious education duties. She provides ministry to our congregation at many levels: in pastoral care, in the pulpit, in stewardship, administration, spiritual development, rites of passage, worship, senior leadership and overall care for our congregation. She has dedicated her life to care for our congregation. When we learned that churches can ordain ministers outside of fellowshiping, we began to investigate the possibility of ordaining Leia.

We thought deeply about the pain and fracturing that our beloved community has suffered in recent years. We thought about the need for reconciliation and healing. And, we thought about what we need in our church leadership. We need leaders who understand our needs and are willing to work hard on our behalf. We need leaders with integrity, wisdom, perseverance, tolerance, kindness, and a steadfast dedication to living according to our UU principles.

We realized that Leia is such a leader and has been such a leader for decades in our church. She knows our history and our people and has stayed committed to us through all our struggles.

As we continued to explore, we realized that we had a lot to learn about all the complicated questions related to ordination before we could bring this exploration to the congregation. We have begun to answer these questions and we are presenting this information to the congregation in this document. We hope to have congregational conversations soon in order to find out more questions that people have and to find more answers together.

What would Leia's title be?

Leia would be our Minister of Faith Development, Reverend Leia Durland Jones.

What benefit does ordaining Leia bring to our church?

We recognize that Leia has been and is a minister to us. She has provided tremendous service to us in her role as Director of Faith Development, but she has served as even more than a religious education director for decades. Ordaining Leia would formally recognize her ministry.

By ordaining Leia we would also be formally recognizing her as a leader of our church. We would be stating that we believe she is one of our leaders, we want to empower her to continue to lead and we need her wisdom and experience in church leadership.

What is the vision of ordaining Leia?

We envision Leia's ordination as:

- a public recognition of Leia's gifts and contributions in long ministry to TJMC UU, and a calling forth of her ministry in new ways
- a milestone in affirming our ideal of collaborative leadership that is intentionally anti-oppressive, non-hierarchical, and multicultural
- a platform from which to launch us into the church we aspire to, the church our community needs
- A congregation can recognize a minister in their midst when someone has the skills of a minister, including diplomacy, staying power, leadership and wisdom. Leia would be ordained by our congregation and her ordination would not travel to another congregation unless they choose to recognize her ordination, which is their right.

What does ordaining Leia bring to our church?

Ordaining Leia begins to stabilize our church by bonding to us the leadership of our longest-serving, incredibly dedicated, and very effective minister. It promises us that we, and our children, will be able to experience Leia's ministry, undiluted, unmoderated and even amplified. It sets the stage for bringing in a settled minister whose skills complement Leia's and whose success will be substantially magnified by having Leia's leadership, experience, and relationship with our congregation. It places

our church in the forefront of organizing and operating in the way we want the world to be.

Does the UUA support this kind of ordination?

The task force has consulted and interviewed many key UU and UUA leaders, and will continue to do so. As Connie Goodbread, Acting Co-Lead of the Southern Region Congregational Life team explains it:

There are two kinds of ordained ministers in Unitarian Universalist congregations:

- Fellowshiped ministers who obtain a master's degree in divinity, meet the criteria listed by the UUA and are ordained by a congregation.
- Ministers ordained to the ministry of a particular congregation, not recognized to UU Ministry in general.

Would ordaining Leia mean we would have 2.5 ministers?

We currently have one half-time assistant minister. When we ordain Leia we will have 1.5 ministers on staff. If and when we hire an interim, then we will have 2.5. So, yes, we would have 2.5 ministers once we ordain Leia and also once we call our interim/developmental/settled minister. Alex will continue in her role as half-time Assistant Minister.

Leia will still lead our Lifespan Faith Development program as she has done for 27 years, so we will not be adding another staff member. Leia has been functioning as more than the Director of Faith Development for many years. She provides pastoral care, worship, administration, and leadership to our congregation beyond our Faith Development program. As one of our ordained ministers she would continue as a minister in our church and her ministerial role would be formalized.

Does ordaining Leia mean she would be a settled minister in our church?

No. When ministers are "called" by a congregation via a congregational vote to be their settled minister, they are in essence "hired by the congregation". Ministers who are not called by the congregation are hired by the Board. The Board may ask for a congregational vote of affirmation for the Board's recommendation to hire a non-called minister, but ministers who are not called by the congregation are responsible to the Board. They are not considered "settled" ministers. Leia can be ordained by our congregation and serve as one of our ministers without being one of our settled ministers.

Will we need to change our bylaws in order to ordain Leia?

Several people have reviewed the TJMC bylaws and found that the only the part of the bylaws that apply to ordaining ministers is:

ARTICLE XIII - Minister(s) XIII.1 – Fellowship. All candidates for Settled Minister(s) shall be in fellowship or in process of fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

So, No. Ordaining Leia is not calling her to be a settled minister; this section does not apply. No changes in the bylaws are necessary to ordain Leia as one of our ministers.

Are we endorsing a collaborative leadership model with this action?

Yes. We envision a leadership model in which all staff work cooperatively with each other, contributing their expertise and experience to the mission of the church. Our ministry would be based on professional collaboration instead of a traditional hierarchical model. We would expect our model to repel egotists and attract collaborative, mission-oriented leaders. We would hope to leave latitude for Leia, the new settled minister, and all staff to work together to define their working relationships.

What would be Leia's role?

The culmination of this exploration would be that Leia would be one of our ordained ministers. Leia and fellow ministers would work together to decide how to share the ministry to best use the strengths and skills each one brings to our congregation. We would expect all members of the leadership team to engage effectively in stewardship.

Leia would continue to do many of the things she already does for and with us. She would still be involved with Faith Development for children, youth and adults, provide pastoral care, participate in all strategic and programmatic planning, and support volunteers in various aspects of church life. We would see her in the pulpit, beyond intergenerational services.

We would bestow on her through the act of ordination the title "Reverend."

How would this affect the current Assistant Minister and her ministry?

Alex is beloved in this congregation; her ministry and presence are very important to the life of our church, and we would expect to preserve her contributions much as they are today. We would expect to see her gifts in the pulpit and in pastoral care, among other places.

We all agree Leia is a beloved treasure in our leadership. How do we separate the difficulties of ordination from the personality of the person we are talking about?

Sensitive though it is, it is part of the process to ask questions, raise issues, and ultimately to vote. And while we can say that "we're talking about the position, not the person," we are, in fact, talking about one of our own. Leia understands this. We have to believe that these discussions can happen under the protective mantle of courtesy, respect, and openness. The task force has included Leia in our meetings, and we hope she will be included in your discussions.

What are the logistical details of an ordination?

This task force won't tackle that question, joyous though it would be. The UUA provides information and an Ordination and Installation Manual:
<https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/ordination>

What financial planning comes with ordaining Leia?

The UUA Fair Compensation Salary Recommendations for Leia as our Director of Faith Development with 27 years of experience are similar to those for an Assistant Minister. Sadly, all our staff are paid significantly less than the recommendations and Leia is paid nearly \$10K less than the Fair Compensation salary recommendation. We

are committed to providing all our staff with equitable pay and benefits, and our plans to move out of our current financial stress will reflect that goal. As our congregation moves forward with long range planning, we expect that all our staff will be compensated at the recommended levels.

Why doesn't Leia have or go get a Master of Divinity?

Nearly every organization, recognizes lived experience as equivalent to higher education. It isn't in Leia's, her family's, or the church's enlightened self-interest for her to pursue a degree in divinity now. Leia wants to continue her ministry in our church. If she were to pursue being a fellowshipped minister she would likely have to ultimately move to another congregation.

What qualifications do we want in our ordained ministers and does Leia have those qualifications?

We want our ordained ministers to:

- Have sufficient experience to be able to minister to the needs of our congregation including the needs for fiscal responsibility, stewardship, strategic and program planning, faith development, pastoral care, a commitment to social justice and a prophetic voice in the pulpit.
- Have the wisdom and maturity to guide us in reconciliation, healing, and growth
- Exhibit integrity and professionalism in all the work of our church
- Lead with compassion and understanding of our differences while emphasizing and building on our shared dedication to the UU principles
- Have knowledge and experience of working with teams of congregants and professional staff to ensure that our work and missions proceed according to our goals

Leia has all these qualifications and more and she has demonstrated these qualifications in decades of service to our congregation.

Appendix
Notes on Conversations with Advisors

Notes from Dawn Dirks' conversation with UU Minister, The Reverend Dr. Linda Olson Peebles, President of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association for four years.

<https://www.uucr.org/connect/get-know-us/staff/rev-dr-linda-olson-peebles>

1. It is important for the congregation to know that it has only been since consolidation of Unitarian and Universalist associations that the UUA has become involved in the process of determining who can be ordained. Although membership in the UU Ministers Association is offered to people who get credentialed by UUMA and get ordained by a congregation, Linda Olson Peebles does not consider ordination of ministers by congregations to be a renegade action. There is a long tradition of congregational polity for ordination.
2. The UUMA is moving away from the idea of a learned ministry and toward the idea of a learning ministry for the UU faith. This means that the UUMA is recognizing the importance of learning that takes place on the job.
3. In many ways, Leia's leadership exemplifies the qualities that ordained ministers look for in colleagues:
 - a. She knows how to do collaborative leadership.
 - b. She is committed to continuing education. For 27 years, she has continued to participate in training.
 - c. Leia has a valuable quality of understanding covenants and boundaries within congregations.
 - d. Leia is looking toward the well-being of the whole community/congregation.
4. Linda noted that Leia has the qualities necessary in a person who is qualified to be ordained. She said that Leia IS IN FACT respected and acknowledged as qualified for this role by ministers and UU professionals outside of our congregation.
5. Ordaining Leia affirms/confirms how we feel about her and her role in church leadership. It will help guide us to a new minister who wants to work with Leia.

Pam McIntire's notes from her conversation with Connie Goodbread, Acting Co-Lead of the Southern Region Congregational Life staff team

<https://www.uua.org/offices/people/connie-goodbread>

I spoke with Connie about how we can explore Leia's ministry in our church. She emphasized several points.

- There are two kinds of ordained ministers in Unitarian Universalism
 - o Fellowshiped ministers who go through the process of getting a masters in divinity degree, meeting the criteria listed by the UUA and then ordination by a congregation. Fellowshiped ministers can go to other congregations and be recognized as an ordained minister.
 - o Ministers ordained to the ministry of a particular congregation, but not recognized to Unitarian Universalist ministry as a whole.
- A congregation can recognize a minister in their midst when someone has the skills of a minister, including diplomacy, staying power, leadership, and wisdom.
 - o This minister would not be recognized as a fellowshiped minister and would not be able to be a minister in another congregation.
- The UUA wants to maintain a high quality of standards for ordaining ministers and Connie feels that we should even raise the standards to include the levels of emotional maturity and leadership that Leia possesses.
- Sadly, even within our beloved Unitarian Universalist Community, there is a hierarchy of leadership that disempowers leaders who are not ordained ministers even when they have been steadfast, wise, leaders in our communities for decades.
- Historically, Leia has frequently not been awarded the respect that she deserves by other ministers. Ordaining her in our congregation, would make the statement that, to us, she is a minister and we want her to be treated as a leader in our congregation with the respect she deserves.
- Connie fully supports our ordaining Leia as a minister in our church.

**Elizabeth's communication with Jan Gartner, Compensation and Staffing Practices
Manager, Office of Church Staff Finances, (617)948-6424 jgartner@uua.org**

From: Jan Gartner <jgartner@uua.org>
Sent: Monday, August 19, 2019 10:56 AM
To: Elizabeth Breeden <brs@cstone.net>
Subject: RE: advice on who to call

Re ordination, I appreciate you asking. Here's the [UUA's position on ordination](#). Yeah, it's a mixed message: yes you can do it and it's an important part of our polity, but we don't advise it.

Personally, I am generally not a fan of this kind of ordination, and in your situation it gives me pause for a couple of reasons:

- It can be confusing, since the ordination/ministerial designation granted within your congregation may not be well understood outside of it. Would she be a UUMA member and held to those standards of accountability? Would she use the title in her LREDA/denominational work? As you are on a path to bringing in a new lead minister, what would be the implications for their relationship? I am wondering if Leia is feeling the need to solidify her standing in some way in the context of this transition. How does it relate to your discernment about the leadership model? Taking this action without being completely clear about where you are heading with your leadership model may be putting the cart ahead of the horse, yes? I would not want to see this backfire or give a potential incoming minister pause. In short, perhaps the goal is clarity, but I believe it could have the opposite effect.
- It inadvertently reinforces the long-held mindset that you need to be a minister for your leadership to truly "count" within our Association. What does it mean when a fantastic, highly-valued religious educator feels the need to get ordained in order to have her role be fully validated? Believe me, as a Credentialed Religious Educator working in a highly minister-centric area of the UUA, I get it! At the same time, having strong, non-ordained religious educators in key UUA and congregational positions has been powerful in helping disrupt some of our operating assumptions – and I believe it has elevated religious educators in their own right.

What do you think Leia is looking for? Might there be another way to achieve it? Maybe in the end, this is an appropriate step to take – but with the blessing of your next settled lead minister? All of this said, Leia is a fine religious educator and human being – a blessing to your congregation in good times and difficult times alike. If you choose to ordain her, I know it will be a much-celebrated occasion within and beyond your faith community.

Jan

Karen Prairie's Notes from a conversation with Rev. Keith Kron, [Transitions in Unitarian Universalist Association Ministries and Faith Development](#)

<https://www.uua.org/offices/people/keith-kron>

I spoke with Keith Kron and he is very supportive of our congregation ordaining Leia..

Here is a summary of what he had to say:

There is some precedence as several congregations have ordained their Music Ministers. I have the info on which ones and who that we can reach out to. Also, this is becoming common in UCC to ordain people because of the ministry they have been doing.

The UCC model means the ordination pertains only to the ordaining congregation and not for the entire denomination.

The shared ministry model is trending in our denomination, so it's definitely the right direction to go. Which is to say, I think we'll find someone who wants to come to Cville under that model.

In ordaining Leia, we would be honoring what she has done. We would be living our values and validating her ministry. It's an important ministry in our church. There are multiple ministries happening all the time.

It was not radical when we introduced the Ministry of Religious Education.

Elaine Chapman's summary of her conversation with Makanah Morriss, UU Minister
<https://www.uuma.org/person/8364525/Makanah-Morriss.htm>

On 9/20/19, I spoke with Makanah Morriss, a retired minister who lives in Lynchburg. She made these points:

- She acknowledged that Leia is "well-known and a most excellent" UU professional with 27 years of experience.
- Makahah is aware of the congregation's past, and affirmed that Leia has been a "steady center in all the transitions over the years"; she has been the "key to health and strength in this congregation".
- Ordaining an individual without a MDiv degree has been done before and Makahah stated that the congregation has the "right to ordain and call her".
- Makanah has talked with her ministerial colleagues who agreed that "once in a while something like this happens."
- Ordaining Leia would "recognize her (Leia's) breadth of expertise and elevate her 'ministering' all these years".
- To gain input from the congregation, Makahan suggested that the task force ask members what their experience has been with Leia. In doing so, it should reveal a wealth of support for this endeavor..