

There's a joke most ministers encounter fairly early in their careers. The Sunday service has just ended and the minister is standing at the sanctuary entrance bidding farewell to his flock (I say "his" because what I'm about to describe could never happen to any of the female ministers I've known). He finds himself looking down at a young boy as the line makes its way by and is surprised when the tyke extends his hand with a dollar in it and says, "Here, I want you to have this gift."

"Why that's very nice of you," the minister says. "What made you think of doing that for me?"

"Well," the boy replies, "My father says your the poorest minister he's ever seen."

There are poor ministers in this sense and in such cases, it's unfortunate for the congregations and communities they serve. But there is another kind of poor minister, the dedicated man or woman who is drowning in the debts incurred to enter the ministry, who can't meet living expenses due to a health crisis, who has reached retirement age without enough savings to live on, who...well, I won't go on with this list. As all of you know, there are countless ways good people lose their financial footing in today's economy. For these individuals and their loved ones, misfortune is no joking matter.

There are no Unitarian Universalist pulpits that offer individuals the opportunity many other professions do to become wealthy. Some of us benefit greatly from having spouses with good jobs, resources we accumulated in other careers before entering the ministry, or inheritances. But a substantial number of the several thousand living U.U. ministers are not so sheltered. That has always been true, but the situation is getting worse not better. The average new U.U. minister today – the average – begins their search for their first pulpit with \$50,000 in education debt.

For that reason, the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1990 established the Living Tradition Fund to augment the resources left by a number of generous individuals in various modest scholarship and support funds for ministers and their families. There is a major collection for the fund each year at General Assembly and most congregations now follow the request, as we will today, that an offering be taken at ordinations and installations to add to those resources. Everything collected each year is disbursed. The gifts include tuition support for seminary students, education loan repayment grants, emergency help with utilities, and grants for food, shelter and medical bills for current and retired ministers. There have been at least one case where the Fund paid for hospice care so that a minister without surviving family members would not die alone.

Mara's installation celebrates intentional presence – her decision to be with you and yours to be with her on your spiritual journeys. I invite you now to to broadcast that spirit of intentional presence into the wider world of Unitarian Universalism by giving as generously as you are able in this offering for the Living Tradition Fund.

