

What's Next Update

Sunday March 30, 2025

Purpose of the Meeting

1. Present the options we've explored and what we've learned.
2. Remind all of us: we are a congregational church, ***where important decisions are made by congregational vote.***
3. Gather your feedback and answer questions.

Agenda

- I. Update & Timeline on Rev. Mary's Retirement
- II. Summary of Congregational Input Survey
- III. Options for Moving Forward After Rev. Mary's Retirement
- IV. Vision for Unity of Buffalo
- V. Next Steps
- VI. Q&A /Congregation shares

Together, we embrace this transition with prayer, patience, and trust. Thank you for your kindness and understanding—by supporting each another, we are creating an opportunity for a rewarding and fulfilling experience for all of us.

I. **Update on Rev. Mary's Retirement** - This outlines the plan for Rev. Mary's transition into retirement, including key dates and changes in workload and responsibilities:

A. **May 1, 2025** – Rev. Mary will reduce her workload and salary to **60%**.

1. Responsibilities are being reassigned to others.

2. The community is encouraged to **gradually rely less on Rev. Mary** for every situation.

3. **Communication change:** Instead of calling Rev. Mary's cell, please call the office unless it's an emergency.

B. **September 1, 2025** – Depending on our organization's needs, Rev. Mary's role will be further reduced to **between 10% and 25%** of her previous workload.

C. **January 1, 2026** – Rev. Mary will be **fully retired** as the Minister of Unity of Buffalo and become our newest Reverend Emerita.

- *Retired Unity ministers must refrain from church activities and visiting church grounds for one year.*
- *Exception: They may return if specifically requested for a funeral or similar service.*

II. Summary of Congregational Input

A. 30+ people responded – it's not too late! You can still respond on the website or on paper!!

B. High Level Summary of "What's Next" Survey Input

A. Sunday Service Priorities:

Maintain a Unity focus, incorporate prayer and meditation, vibrant music, engaging guest speakers, and keep services to one hour.

B. Community & Engagement:

Support through Sunday services, Spirit Groups, prayer chaplains, Unity-based and complementary classes, volunteer recognition, and regular updates.

C. Future Vision:

Honor Unity's history while expanding into a dynamic spiritual center. Consider a name change, strengthen nature and EarthCare initiatives, and increase outreach by renting space, hosting events, and engaging in community activities.

D. Desired Minister Qualities:

Reflect Rev. Mary's compassionate and approachable leadership, embody Unity principles, demonstrate strong practical and conflict-resolution skills.

E. Transition Approach:

Navigate change with mindfulness—stay centered, embrace joy, try new things, and use Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and visualization.

F. Operations & Facilities:

Expand Christie's role, hire additional office staff, and consider a part-time maintenance person.

C. Here are some of the changes we've made so far:

1. Services are now about an hour long.
2. Guest speakers are helping lead Sunday lessons. (Dawn, Mary Beth & Claudia)
3. Rev. Mary is gradually passing on her responsibilities. (Christie, Dawn & Michelle)
4. Thanks to Millie Gibbs's vision and dedication, we had a special celebration in February to honor our wonderful volunteers.
5. We are implementing quarterly Congregational meetings.
6. We've renewed our commitment to sharing Unity teachings (Charles & Myrtle Fillmore, 12 Powers, etc.)

III. Options for Moving Forward After Rev. Mary's Retirement

- A. Congregation-led Model without a Minister
- B. Hire a New Minister
- C. Hire a Minister of Record
- D. Special Dispensation Process

A. Congregation-led Model without a Minister

1. Unity Worldwide Ministries (UWM) requires affiliated congregation-based ministries to be **led by an ordained Unity minister**.
- 2.Exception:** Special Dispensation process, e.g. ministry led by someone on the ministerial track. (*Covered in D. below*)

Going Rogue!

B. Hire a New Minister

Step 1: Transitional Specialist (Interim Minister)

An Interim Minister provides stability and guidance during the transition, helping the congregation prepare for a new minister. This period allows for reflection, ensuring a thoughtful hiring process, a strong fit, and a warm, accepting welcome for the incoming minister.

- 1. Certification & Training:** An ordained Unity Minister becomes a Transitional Specialist (Interim Minister) through a year-long training and certification process.
- 2. Flexible Responsibilities:** Duties and responsibilities are negotiable, with recommended compensation at 75%-100% of the previous minister's salary, plus possible travel and lodging.
- 3. Limited Availability:**
 - Few Interim Ministers are available, and even fewer have Integral Ministry Practice (IMP) training.
 - UWM currently has approximately 10 certified Interim Ministers, all of whom are actively serving in ministries, leaving none currently available for placement elsewhere.

B. Hire a New Minister

Step 2: Permanent Minister

- 1. Nationwide Shortage:** Few permanent ministers are available, with some churches searching for over three years.
- 2. Minister of Record Option:** While searching, over 40 churches are utilizing a Minister of Record for spiritual and administrative support (*see Section C. below*).

C. Hire a Minister of Record

- 1. Role & Purpose:** A Minister of Record provides offsite spiritual support and administrative guidance to a Unity ministry, ensuring it meets leadership requirements set by UWM. They have at least five years of experience and are in good standing with UWM.
- 2. Primary Responsibilities:** Supporting foundational Unity teachings, increasing awareness of UWM resources, assisting with ministry operations (including attending board meetings), and ensuring alignment with UWM's sustainability and viability standards.
- 3. When It's a Good Fit:** Ideal for ministries facing financial challenges, declining attendance (under 25 people), or considering dissolution.

NOTE: Rev Mary CANNOT be the Minister of Record for Unity of Buffalo

If you would like full details of the Minister or Record a copy is available on our website under the About Us – Unity Leadership tab.

D. Special Dispensation Process

1. **Requirement:** UWM requires affiliated congregation-based ministries to be led by an ordained Unity minister.
2. **Exception:** If no ordained Unity Minister is available, UWM offers a Special Dispensation process.
3. **Purpose:** *Allows a congregation to hire one of its own members as minister while they complete ministerial prerequisites and attend ministerial school.*
4. **Process:**
 - a. The candidate must apply for Special Dispensation with church approval.
 - b. Once accepted, they must actively train for ministry and are assigned a mentor for guidance. **Note: training is done virtually.**
 - c. **Ministerial Training Timeline:**
 - Full-time: Prerequisites take about one year, followed by two years of ministerial school, for a total of three years.
 - **Part-time: Candidates balancing church leadership and other responsibilities can follow a flexible part-time schedule while making steady progress.**

If you would like full details of the Special Dispensation Process, a copy is available on our website under the About Us – Unity Leadership tab.

IV. Vision for Unity of Buffalo

V. Next Steps

A. We are a congregational church governed by New York State law. This means the congregation votes on important decisions, such as selecting a new minister. **A special congregational meeting will be held no later than September 1, 2025, where members will vote to determine the path forward.**

(As a reminder, to vote, you are required to be an official member of Unity of Buffalo. A new member class is being offered this Spring.)

B. We welcome your questions, comments, or concerns. Please share those with the Board or the What's Next Leadership Team

1. Board members: Clem Olson (President), Annabelle Ludwick (Vice President), Latasha Spivey (Secretary), Lonny Gibb (Treasurer), Joyce Gais, Max Redlawski and Rev Mary Masters (Trustees at-large), Harriet Gromer-Hicks (Keeper of the Flame)

2. What's Next Leadership Team: Christine Bush, Lonny Gibbs, Dawn Lewandowski, Rev. Mary Masters, John Michaels, Michelle Olandese, Lynn Tranchell, Mary Beth Wollenschlaeger

VI. Q&A /Congregation shares

***Thank you for being part of this community—
together, we are creating something truly
powerful!***