

Make a Taste

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It's so wonderful being here with all of you--starting a new church year, starting a new ministry during your transition time. Transitions offer an opportunity to stand back and take stock of where you've come and where you are going. It's a very satisfying thing to do. It's a time to affirm your strengths and successes and dream big about the future. My role, along with a transition team, will be to facilitate this exploration. This could and most certainly will involve some new experiences. We will have two years together and that is both a long time and a short time. It is a long time in that we will have plenty of time to get to know each other and do some good work together. It is a short time in that time flies when we're having fun. And we will have fun. Before you know it two years will be up and you will hopefully be engaging with a new settled minister. That will make our ending a joyful time. But during this time too, I will be your minister in all the ways you are used to: pastoral care, worship, ceremonies and classes. I look forward to all of that too.

Summertime is often a time for play, for going to new places or enjoying ones you already know and love. I always find that I get a new perspective about myself and my life when I go to a new place.

Richard Russo, the novelist wrote a book not too long ago about a family that moves to a new city. It is called *The Bridge of Sighs*. Here is a passage from the book that I really like because he describes so vividly the inner life of a young boy and his adventures. See if you can relate to this:

“What I discovered I liked best about striking out on my bicycle was that the farther I got from home, the more interesting and unusual my thoughts became. I discovered I could think things in a new landscape that never would have occurred to me at home or in my own well-traveled neighborhood. I was just a boy, of course, and my thoughts were those of a boy and, as such, probably no

different from the thoughts of thousands of other boys my age, but they were new to me and seemed as strange and unaccountable as the recent transformations of my body, which now required new shoes every few months. My mother had recently taken to buying my pants several inches too long, cuffing them thickly, then slowly letting them out as I grew. When I set out on my bike, it was usually with a sense of anticipation, not just that I might discover something new...or someone new..., but also I might think something new and unexpected, as if I were letting out my brain, its thoughts, much as my mother let out my pants' cuffs. And when returning home from my travels, I had the very pleasurable sense that I was a different boy from the one who'd left and half expected my parents and neighbors to notice the change.

But also this. If setting out into the unknown was thrilling, so, in a different but equally strange way, was coming back. I almost never rode home directly and instead wove a route through all the streets of our East End neighborhood, taking inventory of the houses and sheds and chain-link fences, to make sure nothing had vanished or been swallowed up by the hollow earth while I was away, that everything was in its correct place, as if to reclaim all of it as my own. ...I was...learning how intense the pleasure of the familiar can be, how welcome and reassuring the old, safe, comforting places of the world and the self."

Returning now to First Universalist Church, you may be experiencing that pleasure of the familiar and perhaps some sense of having been away, really away and returning as a somewhat different person to a somewhat different church. It is a joy to see familiar faces and know that they are happy to see you. I have really enjoyed how enthusiastically everyone has greeted me and welcomed me here. I think this is a church that really values hospitality and welcomes new people warmly and with anticipation in a very natural way. These are fabulous qualities.

This summer my wife, Jennifer, and I were invited by Jennifer's mother, Carol and her boyfriend, Richard, to come to Europe with them. My mother-in-law, Carol, really wanted to give her daughter an experience of a luxury trip to places she'd never been before. So, it started as a gift of a river cruise down the Rhine river in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It was incredibly generous of her and exciting. It turned out that though that a couple of weeks before we were to leave, the cruise was cancelled due to low water levels in the river. It's been an incredibly

hot summer all over Europe. So, now what? Carol then found a land tour through the alps that had 4 places left and she jumped on that--not quite as exciting as a river cruise but still--the alps! So we were in business again, however it was not to be. The hotels that we'd have to book for this tour were full, so we couldn't do it. After considering a number of options, we decided to rent a car in Munich and tour the alps by car stopping wherever we wanted to. We all liked this idea. And so this is how we went. At a stop in Fussen, Germany near the Austrian border. We found a small hotel with a good rating and went inside to see if there were rooms available. A large, rather bald man came to the front desk and said that he could possibly find some rooms for us. He was rather gruff and was almost ordering us around rather than welcoming us. He told us that we would be seated together for breakfast at 8:00. In the morning, Richard, went down a little early to try and get a cup of coffee before breakfast. The owner, said, "Nein!" "You sit and wait for all to come together". It didn't seem like he had a choice. When the rest of us came down, we were seated as promised and treated to a beautiful breakfast with an array of breads, cheeses and meats to choose from. It turns out that this man was an acclaimed chef, clearly proud of his skills and not willing to compromise. Richard was rather rigid in his food preferences and when he saw something he was unfamiliar with he would ask what it was before trying it. The chef didn't have enough English to explain everything so he finally said, "Make a taste" and that became a perfect motto for our trip. Whenever any of us hesitated to try something new, we would encourage each other to "Make a taste!" It had to be said with a proper, stern German accent which became more exaggerated as we went along. It was the source of a lot of laughter for us. It's not a bad motto when you think about it. There are things and times when you absolutely shouldn't make a taste, but when it's something that's meant to be good, even if we haven't tried it before perhaps we should make a practice of making a taste.

My mother in law decided one year that she would say 'yes' to any invitations that year. This resulted in several new experiences including tailgating at a Red Sox game and ziplining.

There is so much that is painful in the world, that perhaps this advice seems kind of frivolous and yet, we are sometimes offered, not food, but the opportunity for a new experience and a chance to help someone. A friend recently went with her

Jewish congregation in Texas, to the Mexican border to place jugs of water along a well-known path in the desert where desperate people attempt to enter the country and make it to safety over very rough, hot and dry trails. It was a brave and compassionate thing for her to do.

So I hope for all of us this year, that we will not hesitate, at least not too much, to Make a Taste when we are invited to do so. Let's make this a year of discovery, of new connections, of new friends and new experiences.

May it be so.