

# Our Vision

Whether faint or strong, it is often some form of longing that brings people to church.

They may feel a longing for connection with something larger than themselves – the interdependent web of existence, the Spirit of Life, or what some call God. They may feel a longing for community – for the camaraderie, companionship, and comfort that can hold them through hard times and good times.

They may feel a longing to help make the world a better place – to fight the injustices and heal the hurts in this world that is both beautiful and broken. Or they may feel a longing to give their children, their family, grounding in all of these ways of connection.

Whether felt as a small stirring of suggestion on the edge of one's mind, or felt as an intense, can't-be-ignored desire, it is longing that compels people to seek out a community of faith.

There is an embodied exercise we ministers sometimes lead – in a bonded, small group setting, or on a spiritual retreat, or in an intimate worshipful setting. The simple structure offers participants the opportunity, if they wish, to both give and receive a blessing. Folks gather in a circle.

After a centring meditation or prayer, each person, in turn, looks into the eyes of the person next to them, holds their hand, and says, "I hold your hand in mine so that you know these two things: You are precious, and you are not alone."

The wording of the statement can vary according to the leader's theology.

When we, Shana and Melora, lead such rituals, the statement is always an expression of these two points:

- 1) We are all connected by something larger than ourselves – be it the Web of Life, the Spirit of Love, or what some call God.
- 2) Each person in this interdependent web is lovable and valuable, including you – yes, even you. You have special gifts to give this world that only you can give.

Whatever form the longing takes in our parishioners, our job as ministers is to encourage them to lean into the truth that under-girds the longing: You are connected, held in a larger whole. You are valuable, precious. You have gifts to give this world that only you can give. When people are plugged into the power of this truth they step into a sort of "best self."

And here we come to the crux of Shana's and Melora's ministry. Our ministry is about helping people step into and live out of the best selves they long to be.

Most people have a sense of what their own best self would be. It's the self that emerges most readily when you are content, when you feel safe, at peace, loved, and loveable. It's the part of you that reaches out from that place of centredness and smiles upon the world – the self that is naturally loving, gentle, kind, generous, forgiving. Perhaps you know what your own version looks like.

In theological terms it can be said that the best self is rooted in the divine spark, the god within, what the Quakers call our

“inner light” or “inward teacher.” Our best self is who we are when we are living into and out of our divine potential.

By “best” self we do not mean perfect self. It’s not a best self that eats only healthy foods, knows exactly what to say in every social situation, does one’s profession flawlessly. It is not a best self that never makes mistakes.

When we say “best” self, we mean authentic self. You find it, not by reaching up toward some ultimate ideal version of yourself, but by settling down into yourself. It is relaxing into whom you really are, whom you already are – your most genuine self – honest, vulnerable, human.

We all have our own particular gifts and skills that enable every one of us to make the world a better place. That’s our ministry with a lower case “m” – the shared ministry that all of us are called to do.

And yet, sometimes, as individual human beings, we doubt our capacity to do this ministry. The struggles in our world feel bigger than we can grasp, let alone help to remedy. We’re not sure where to start and, once we’ve started, whether our efforts will amount to much.

This is where a community of faith comes in. It is the role of the church and its ministers to remind everyone who enters that we are the gift we bring and that, when we combine our gifts, we can indeed make a difference.

We, Shana and Melora, strive to help each person in our congregation discern their own ministry. And then we help build a community that supports and empowers the shared ministry – in which each person is using his/her own gifts, in which we are all working together to make this world a better place.

We hope to meet you at church!

***Reverends Melora and Shana Lynngood***