

Message from (our new minister) Rev. Robert (Bob) Murphy

Floribbean Community Ministry

I've been with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa for the past three years as a frequent guest speaker. Our relationship will change on the first day of November. I'll become the congregation's chaplain and community minister. What do chaplains do? Where does community ministry start? Begin with the understanding that the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa represents liberal religion in Hillsborough County.

Our congregation celebrates diversity and unity. We're not defined by a particular creed. We welcome Jews and Christians, Muslims and Hindus, and the representative of other groups, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, and people who are "spiritual but not religious." Pagans are prominent in our congregation. We ask people to care for each other and their environment.

I've become a Florida guy during the past twenty years and I'm involved with Floribbean ministry. Floribbean ministry is like a tropical salad. Ingredients received from the Caribbean islands, the Latin American mainland, and places in Africa, Asia, and Europe are combined with American Indian influences. Floribbean spirituality is syncretistic and it's delicious. Bakers and cooks invented the term "Floribbean" and bakers and cooks deserve special mention during the November and December holidays. Florida has its delights and it also faces some challenges. Florida receives about five hundred new arrivals per day. These are people who want to settle in the Sunshine State. In addition, we have new babies to celebrate. For the year 2024, almost 20, 000 infants were born in Hillsborough County. Many families search for affordable housing, adequate medical care, healthy food, and other basics. The Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa provides community ministry. We try to be helpful in every season.

I'll join the Unitarian Universalist Church of Florida. We'll welcome all age groups to our sanctuary. Together, we'll discover some of the best practices for promoting community wellness in Florida. We can share the flowers and the food that we've helped to grow. We can join with others to defeat systemic racism and homophobia and religious bigotry and the other forms of oppression.

Our congregation has been working for many months to improve accessibility. I live with partial disability, and I appreciate the kindness that I've received from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa. Starting in November, I'll be present in the flesh for at least two weekends each month to help our congregation



with Sunday services and church projects. For the other days, we'll connect by electronic means for committee meetings, religious education, and shared ministry.

For folks who want more biographical information, let it be said that I'm a graduate of Harvard's Divinity School and I'm also a graduate of Boston University's School of Public Health. I've been a pastor, but I prefer being a coach and a mutual aid chaplain. My emphasis is on creating teamwork guided by Unitarian Universalist values, traditions, and insights. I helped to establish the Green Sanctuary program, and I helped to establish CUUPS and other national programs for the Unitarian Universalists. In 2011, I received an award from the national Sierra Club in recognition of forty years of environmental justice organizing. Imagine ecological awareness and environmental protection efforts blended with human rights work and concern for human dignity. It's a fusion that helps to explain Floribbean spirituality. There's a need, also, for drumming and poetry, but that experience will have to wait for another day.

Florida is my home. I respond to conch shell trumpets and the taste of strong, sweet coffee in Ybor City. Sometimes I lean to the political right and sometimes I lean to the political left. I'm a libertarian who faithfully defends voter rights and the First Amendment. I'm wary of big government and big corporations. I'm a mutual aid advocate. Some of my spiritual guides are wild things who live in local bayous. I don't like scams and political correctness. I know that climate change is happening. I live close to the Gulf of Mexico, and I've been evacuated three times because of hurricanes. I've decided to stay in my neighborhood because - well, it's part of my ministry.

In November, hundreds of Monarch butterflies travel through Hillsborough County. It's unlikely that the butterflies will join our congregation. Their ways are different from our ways. Still, we can be helpful in providing food and natural shelter. Like the orange butterflies, we're present for an odyssey that continues in this place that's "south of the South." In every season, I want to hear about your dreams, your special insights, and your plans for the future. We can care for each other, and we can extend our love in all directions. We won't be all things for all creatures, but, hey, that's not necessarily a problem. We know that we're one community among many. Monarch butterflies provide all of the monarchy that we need. You'll find them in our church neighborhood. *Avante, por todo la Florida.* Translation: Forward, for all of Florida.