

BY JIM MERRITT
Special to Newsday

Taking on a new pastoral assignment offers opportunities for innovation, building new relationships and experiencing personal growth, say Long Island clergy moving this summer to new congregations. This week's clergy discuss their journeys as well as the excitement, wistfulness and need for trust-building that may be involved in that change.

THE REV. ISRAEL BUFFARDI

Associate Minister for Member and Community Engagement, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock

I see myself as more of a spiritual guide rather than a spiritual leader, not only because I minister with two amazing colleagues, but also because I seek to minister through facilitation and connection. The challenge then, when new, is how to build the trust needed to be invited to travel with people on the journey of community. Humility and curiosity are my approach. If I am to journey with people, they need to be able to trust that I will neither judge nor coerce. I take time to get to know them, and if I do lead, it's from the desire to draw out the unique strengths, passions and perspectives of the people in the community. I ask guiding questions and I offer sacred space and time for people to connect with each other, to seek a sense of something greater than themselves, and to reflect on their orienting values. In short, I seek to be a mirror and a compass, not the navigator. Ultimately, the challenge is knowing when to listen and affirm and when to draw attention



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

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TZIPORA LIFCHITZ

Rishe Groner



LASTING IMPRESSIONS PHOTOGRAPHY

Wendy C. Modeste

ASKING THE CLERGY

What is it like to lead a new congregation?

to ways of being that prevent us from living our values of love and justice.

RABBI RISHE GRONER

Congregation Beth Ohr, Bellmore

A new job is always exciting, and of course somewhat overwhelming. With every big moment comes a new opportunity with great possibility lying ahead. The rabbis teach, "All beginnings are difficult" (Mekhilta D'Rabi Yishmael, 19:5). Change is a tough prospect, especially for an ancient tradition. We are a people set in our ways, and tradition has served us as an anchor amid the chaos of displacement. Judaism is also creative, as people seek to iterate

and grow in spiritual practice and connection to community. As a new rabbi, I strive to be a listener, reflecting the hearts of our community by initiating small steps of change along with a dose of comforting tradition. There's a challenge in finding the sweet spot between tradition and innovation, and also a delight in doing that dance. It's not easy learning the ropes, desiring to keep people feeling safe. It's wonderful to get to know people better, finding creative ways to serve their spiritual and communal needs. Then I take a breath, remembering I'm here as an instrument of the Divine. I know the dance will be joyful, beautiful and growth-filled, for myself and the community.

THE REV. WENDY C. MODESTE

Former Pastor,
United Methodist Church of Bay Shore

After nine years at the United Methodist Church of Bay Shore, I am moving to Queens to serve two congregations in the denomination's Long Island West District: Glendale-Maspeth United Methodist Church and Community United Methodist Church of Middle Village/Forest Hills. While the move is bittersweet, the new appointment follows a tradition instilled by founder John Wesley over 200 years ago. Back then, pastors traveled on horseback to serve various congregations on their circuit. Every few years, the pastors would be appointed to new circuits in an effort to spread the Gospel as the denomination grew. This itinerant system, as it is called, also leads to personal growth for both pastors and their congregations. New voices and different approaches in ministry show believers that there are many wonderful ways to worship God. It's an important lesson in these troubled times, when our country is so divided. So while I leave behind a loving congregation and supportive community, I'm excited to build new relationships in these two posts. I pray that other United Methodist congregations transitioning to new pastors will also embrace change as part of their faith journey. And to my dear friends in Bay Shore, I recall the title of a classic hymn: "God be with you 'til we meet again."

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