

## **A Bit About Who I Am and Where My Journey Has Taken Me**

Rev. Ian W. Riddell

I was born the citizen of two countries in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, in 1968 while my father was completing his PhD at Penn State University. Before I was a year old, we moved back to southeastern Ontario, where both of my parents and their parents before them (and theirs before them) were born and grew up—where my entire biological family lives still. My father was a university professor and my mother a homemaker and accountant, and my younger brother and I grew up in a home where we were loved unconditionally and where success in whatever endeavors we undertook was an unspoken expectation. The neighborhood we grew up in and the kids I went to school with were from a wide economic and ethnic range.

I have lived my life in the church—at first attending a congregation in the United Church of Canada with my parents. When I was eight years old, I was invited to join the well-known choir at the Anglican cathedral in my home town. The church was high Anglican, with cassocks and surplices for the choir and incense on high holy days and an imposing limestone building complete with dome. I grew to find deep spiritual connection and fulfillment in the music and ritual I participated in here. Much of my life outside of school and home was spent at the Cathedral. During high school I was part of our annual musicals, including playing Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* and Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

After high school, I studied music education and choral conducting at the University of Toronto, receiving a Bachelor of Music degree in 1992. I came to Unitarian Universalism soon after, when I was hired to be the music director of a new, small lay-led congregation in Victoria, British Columbia. There I found more than a job—I found a new spiritual home—one in which I could actively participate and grow as a leader. It was here that I began to feel what was to become my calling to ministry: where we called each other to search for our own truths in humility, to test them and live them out in community, and to use our strengths, whatever they were, in the service of the healing of the world.

While living in Victoria, I completed a post-graduate program in education and became an elementary school music teacher. It was also in Victoria that I started my work with community choruses, becoming the co-artistic director of MUSAIC, Victoria's Chorus of Lesbians, Gay Men, and Allies. When Mark went to grad school at Penn State, I followed him back to the land of my birth. I worked for a while running the children's department at the local Barnes and Noble, where I became "Storyman" to a lot of little kids! I then began seven years of work as an Instructional Design specialist at Penn State's distance education department, the World Campus. Here I worked with faculty to design and offer undergraduate and graduate courses in a variety of fields including chemical dependence counseling, psychology, philosophy, and literature. While we lived there I also served as Music Director at the UU Fellowship of Centre County.

In 2002, we moved to Madison, Wisconsin, where I continued to work for Penn State from my home office and became the Co-artistic Director of Perfect Harmony, a gay men's chorus. I also

began work as the Director of Music Ministry at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation. During my time with JRUUC, I also served as a lay minister, chaired the worship committee, and served on the ministerial search committee. It in all of this work that I heard more deeply my call to parish ministry.

This call led me to begin studies for a Masters of Divinity Degree at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. As part of those studies, I completed a summer-long chaplaincy residency at a local Trauma-1 hospital and a year-long ministerial internship at the UU Church of the Monterey Peninsula in Carmel, California. I graduated with my MDiv in the spring of 2012 and was ordained to the UU ministry in August of that year.

From the fall of 2012 to the spring of 2015, I served as Developmental Minister at the UU Congregation of Las Vegas where I worked with the congregation to live into intentional, shared ministry. I collaborated with staff and lay leaders to share vibrant worship, offer diverse learning opportunities for all, and deepen the congregation's work in the wide community.

In the fall of 2015, I began serving the First UU Congregation of San Diego as its first Minister of Music and Worship Arts. Here I served on a multi-minister staff doing the work of "regular" ministry while also overseeing the congregation's worship and music ministries.

When my time at FUUCSD came to an end in 2019, Mark and I moved to the desert and I took some time for reflection, discernment, and recentering. During this time away from ministry, I drove for Uber until the pandemic made that impossible. I also took the opportunity to hone the editing skills I'd developed at Penn State and completed a professional certificate in Copyediting from the University of California at San Diego.

In the summer of 2020, I served as transition minister at Neighborhood UU Congregation in Pasadena. I met several times with Rev. Barbara Fast and when she and UUCOD offered the position of Assistant Minister, I applied and began my service with you in the fall of 2020. When Rev. Barbara retired in 2021, I gratefully accepted a contract to be your minister.

My husband, Mark Harrower, and I met when we were both in high school and began the committed relationship that has become the center of our lives in the summer of 1990 when we were both in college and working at summer jobs across the street from each other. Since that time we have consciously and deliberately crafted a life together centered on love, absolute honesty, intellectual and emotional companionship, tenderness, and trust. We have become home for each other. We have followed each other across the continent and back—for school, for careers, for new careers. In Carmel, Las Vegas, and San Diego, and now here, Mark's partnership, gentle strength, and fierce support enabled my ministry to be healthy and life-giving for both of us.

Our biological families live a long distance away and Mark and I have worked, over the years, to build a chosen family of close friends with whom we share our lives and our home. Mark and this family form the core of my support system as I moved through seminary and into the life of ministry. In the fall of 2018, we added two furry companions to our lives, Russell Terriers

Mushu and Flirt, who have brought us both deep love and a lot of walks! Alongside this family I am blessed with a deep connection to other religious professionals with whom I have worked over the years and, in the last few years, with dear and close colleagues I have found in my time at seminary and into my ministries in Las Vegas, San Diego, and now here in the Coachella Valley.

Outside of the ministry, I am fascinated by serial fiction and its patterns: long-form television shows, comic books, and novel series have always nurtured and entertained me. All of these have become sources of deep spiritual reflection (and sermons!) More than a decade ago now, I took up knitting and find it both soothing and challenging to create with my hands and to make things that are both useable and functional, especially socks. In all of these things, I am intrigued and attracted by patterns—how they appear and shift—how they are consciously built and naturally developing. I get a great deal of pleasure and rejuvenation spending time with trees in the wind, standing in the light of the moon, and exploring the natural world.

I am sustained by the love of these intimate relationships, by my participation in the life of my community, and by my personal spiritual practices including *lectio divina*. I am called to the work of re-building the world shaped by justice, kindness, and humility rather than blindness, selfishness, and violence. I am called primarily to the work of congregational life—of participating in and guiding and ministering with a community that has covenanted to walk together in the task of healing self and the world—to sing and listen and speak and act and teach against separation and for the flourishing of life. To bring the good news of the unity of existence to a culture grounded in individualism and separation—to individuals wounded and shattered by exclusion and indifference and systems of oppression and to those who wound and shatter and exclude. To model a passionate and responsible sharing in the divine adventure of this gloriously messy life we live. And to work, in community, to turn that good news into the construction of a society based in humility, mercy, justice, and love.