

ENDORSEMENTS



Rev. Jim VanderWeele

Introduction

Erik David Carlson was well prepared to help our congregation during his internship. We were still moving through our post-Katrina reentry to life when he arrived. It is impossible to briefly describe the trials faced by the members of our congregation (as well as those from the other two UU churches in this area) during our post-disaster recovery. Erik was sensitive and fully capable of analyzing our needs. He helped to point us toward healing, encouraging us to find our inner strength, promoting personal self-development and congregational recovery.

Erik was with us during a highly formative post-traumatic period. The three UU churches in our area were involved with efforts to form our Greater New Orleans Unitarian Universalists (GNOUU) cluster. He quickly grasped the vision behind this cluster, the intentions for deepening the inter-relatedness between our congregations, and the steps that were needed in order for us to join together and help each other build the presence of our UU faith in our region.

Character

Erik is well grounded, centered, and capable of focusing on his work. He can not only manage a project-at-hand but could also maintain his vision of the way it fit into the larger picture of our church life. He was greatly appreciated by our members and friends.

Erik was also involved in local discussions with advocacy groups and civic organizations (and these meetings became much more common in our post-K lives). His words at these meetings were valued. Several ministers in our area told me they appreciated his presence.

He appeared to be happiest when he was actively working on several projects. He was always dedicated to completing these tasks. We greatly valued his dedication to help us right ourselves—especially for his emphasis on improving our relationship with the world outside our four walls.

Strengths

Erik stated he felt a great sense of accomplishment when a project was completed. He took a “hands on” approach to the many difficult adjustments needed in our fractured post-Katrina life.

(Stress has been ever-present since the day the levees broke. Some here dealt with their private manias. Even the most qualified faced times of weakness; weeks and months of struggles.)

During our second post-Katrina year, Erik competently provided a steady hand. He melded easily into the direction set by our strategic planning group. Although he did not guide the ship, he supported the program for resurrecting the life of our church. Here, too, his kind and gentle approach was greatly appreciated by the members of our church.

Erik is a doer. Projects excite him. His interest in moving church activities forward served as a valuable complement to his supervisor’s focus on re-envisioning the church’s future and the future of our UU faith in the New Orleans area.

Style

One of Erik’s greatest assets is that he is very comfortable around people. Before arrival, he knew his work at Community Church would coincide with an outreach to the other two UU churches in our area. He was able to adapt quite quickly to this development, this change in our local UU makeup. He appreciated the effort to join our three congregations in a combined commitment to work together and support each other.

His Sunday messages were geared toward the specific situations he encountered at Community Church (as well as at North Shore and First Church). His words reached out to people, insofar as his stories about himself and his experiences invited them to look once again at themselves.

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Rev. Erik, Rev. Jim and representatives of the Greater New Orleans UUs
Plenary V - GA 2013 – Photo by UU World

The leadership at North Shore said he challenged them to look at themselves through new eyes. They knew he cared for them and were greatly pleased by his interest in their health and development.

Skills

Erik has a good vision of what should happen in a church community. His sense of a strong and committed church life motivated us to several changes, one of which was a new segment in our services. He encouraged our Community Ministry team to allow our members to hear what they were doing. They began to offer a new segment, Beyond These Four Walls, a section of our service that is still deeply appreciated by our members.

This was just one of the ways in which Erik contributed to the re-envisioning so necessary in the life of our church. But he not only helped us envision our changes, he also made some significant contributions while he was with us.

During his nine months at Community Church (and in the area surrounding us):

- Erik led more than twenty worship services.
- He participated in local meetings, particularly those dealing with health care.
- He redesigned our letterhead and business cards.
- He produced, edited, and coordinated a TV program on our Ethical Living in NOLA series.
- He co-produced our GNOUU promotional materials.
- He designed and initiated our GNOUU web site.
- He upgraded our Community Church UU web site.
- And, he played guitar and sang during our worship services.

Sensitivity to Others

Erik is very interested in chaplaincy and pastoral care. He listened carefully and was very attentive to the troubles and concerns that people shared with him. Several of the younger members of our congregation greatly appreciated his presence and his concern for them.

Areas of Needed Growth

I recall that a difficulty arose on one occasion, a time when Erik was very, very busy. Although his pace of activity remained aggressive throughout his time with us, this incident arose as several deadlines approached at nearly the same time. (I am very familiar with this situation; it seems to arrive much too easily in a post-traumatic setting.)

Erik's real crunch, though, occurred just once. There was a need to develop a break from his blisteringly active schedule. Within a week the projects he continued were at or nearing completion. In addition, he began to feel much better, a sign that his stress was abating.

Erik's effort to ground himself in our ministry through an internship in New Orleans was a mark of his courage and commitment. His work with us exceeded our expectations. We are most grateful and fully pleased and are most happy to recommend the continued progress of his UU ministry.

Rev. Jim VanderWee

Senior Minister, Community Church
Unitarian Universalist of New Orleans