

Earth Care and Spirituality

December 2021

Mushing into Ministry

Lindy Howe

Six thirty a.m.

40 degrees F. below zero.

Ten Alaskan huskies and I, their musher, wait in focused anticipation, at the start line of the Eagle Lake 100-Mile Sled Dog Race in Aroostook County, Maine. The trail winds through wooded forest, across frozen lakes, climbs up over mountains, drops down the other side. We, dogs and I, live for this - for the pure joy of this ancient way of travel in the Northern Forest, at one with God's Creation.

Warm puffs of breath from the team waft into the air. As for me, I have butterflies in my stomach. The sled is packed with survival gear. One needs to be prepared for anything, and for everything, when heading into the Maine wilderness in the heart of winter. Years of dedicated training have brought us to this point.

"Trust your dogs" they say...

" 5,4,3,2,1..... Go!"

I think back on this memory and smile at the similarities with my current journey in ministry. The ministry journey takes place in a bit warmer circumstances, for which I am grateful. Reaching where I am now has taken years of training, years of gaining experience. As with mushing a sled dog team, these have been times of falling off, getting back up, getting dragged along, and not letting go. These have been years of fostering a deeply felt passion, and caring for that passion. I have learned to put the care of others first - as in caring for the dog team, providing hot meaty soup and dry straw for sleeping under the clear star-filled skies - long before I, as musher, rest.

My sled dogs are now retired, a good life of running down the trail, season upon season, behind them; with a continuing good life now as my dear day-to-day companions. Here we are at the start line of a new adventure. Now it is my spiritual toolbox that is packed with survival gear. One needs to be prepared for anything and everything, when heading into ministry. Just as in a sled dog race, ministry will have mushy trails to push through in exhaustion, and some cold dark nights. Yet I know that at other times there will be beautifully groomed trails, spectacular far-reaching views on bright winter days, and tender precious moments.

"Trust God" I say...

" 5,4,3,2,1..... Go!"

Lindy Howe is the pastor at Oxford Congregational Church UCC in Oxford, Maine and at West Auburn Congregational Church UCC in Auburn Maine. She has been a student of the Maine School of Ministry for 6 years and is on a multiple pathway to Ordination. She has raced sled dogs for 28 years and traveled to Maine State Parks from Presque Isle to Cobscook giving dog sled rides to families. Now she is working on her Ordination Paper with a small kennel of retired sled dogs for good company.