

New minister to lead Unitarian Church

By Matt Kelly
Contributing Writer

The Nantucket Unitarian Universalist Church welcomed a new member to their congregation this week. Reverend David Horst, formerly of Malden, Mass. arrived on the island last weekend with his family. He will be serving as the church's new minister, replacing Rev. Jennifer Brooks, who left to lead a congregation in the Midwest.

Prior to his arrival, Horst had never visited Nantucket before. "I knew only of it in story and myth," he said. "I was concluding eight years of ministry in Malden, and it became known to me that Nantucket was available. It looked like a great place to live and a very good congregation and community to serve."

Before entering the ministry, Horst's previous careers included marketing, public relations, arts administration and event management. "At midlife I took a new direction, went back to school, and entered the Unitarian Universalist ministry," Horst said. In 1999 he graduated from the Harvard Divinity School and was ordained a minister.

He was accompanied to the island by his wife, Alyson Gaylord-Loy, and their two children, Darly and Domnica.

While he said he is looking forward to his new ministry, Horst has fond memories of his congregation in Malden as well as his other community-based activities in the Boston area. For five years, he was the manager for Boston's Walk for Hunger, sponsored by Project Bread. During his tenure in Malden, Horst stressed the development of its Sunday morning worship program.

"I work hard to make Sunday morning lively yet engaging and pragmatic in some ways," he said. "It's really the center of religious life."



Photo by Jim Powers

The Reverend David Horst, who is replacing Rev. Jennifer Brooks, at the Unitarian Church on Orange Street Wednesday morning.

In Malden, Horst's work stretched beyond the confines of his church. "I'm very interested in community engagement and finding connections between the religious community and the larger community. I'm particularly interested in the arts and music, in political advocacy work, and environmental work. Religious communities really play such an important role in the life of the

larger community in so many ways and I did a lot of that in Malden, especially reaching out to the new immigrant community and the interfaith community as a well," he said.

Horst said his style is to take a very involved approach to the ministry. He sees the role of a minister as someone who has to support not only the church, but the larger community as well.

"Ministry is a very active, engaged process," he said. "Ministers cannot be navel-gazers or sit behind their desks and simply think great thoughts. Ministers have to get out there. I should say, I have to get out there. Frankly, I'm not very good at sitting behind my desk. I like to be out and about and engaging with people."

Rev. Horst sees his new congregation filling an important role in the religious life of the island.

"This island is fairly diverse religiously. We hold a particular place as Unitarian Universalists because we are the liberals and proudly so. I think we do an especially good job of reaching out to people who really want to be a part of a religious community . . . but are reluctant or just not comfortable in a more traditional setting."

"In our church, we don't abide by any particular creed," stressed Rev. Horst. "We don't tell people what they ought to believe, we simply say come, come as you are, be who you are, be open, be willing to be changed (that's a big one), and bring your gifts, share what you have and help make the religious community an even more welcoming and supportive place."

The recent renovations to the Unitarian Meeting House have Rev. Horst particularly excited. Extensive work to both the interior and exterior have given the building an inspiring facelift. "I can't wait to get in there and preach," said Horst, who will be behind the pulpit Sunday. "It is, as everyone knows, a beautiful place. It's bright, it looks great, it sounds marvelous. We're going to fill it with inspiring words, and great music and song, and some prayer, and really make it happen on Sunday morning for people."

Horst will lead services on Sundays three times a month. His first three sermons are part of a series titled "Finding Wholeness in a Fragmented World."