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## ***Building a Supportive Network for UU Administrators Across Canada***

Congregational administrators quietly hold so much of our ministry together. They are often the first face people meet, the steady organizers, and the ones who make our communities feel like home.

This month, we are shining a spotlight on Janni **Kretlow**, Administrator at North Shore Unitarian Church, and the creator of a peer-led national gathering for UU administrators. Her story — and her vision — illuminate the heart of our Canadian UU community: connection, mutual support, and shared wisdom.

## ***Meet Janni Kretlow— 41 years of service, and creator of the Canadian UU Administrators' Chat***



### ***What first inspired you to become a congregational administrator...?***

My first full-time job (at age 19) was working in a large church in the Seattle area where I was born and raised. That was 41 years ago. My whole career has been in Administration (mostly in churches, although I also managed rental housing properties for a few years in the middle). When I moved to Canada and became eligible to work here, I knew I wanted to continue in an Administrative role. That's when I learned that the North Shore Unitarian Church was looking for a full-time Administrator. It was a match made in "Unitarian heaven"! I love the fact that my job draws on my three strongest skill sets ("people" skills, my ability to organize things, and creativity) in a meaningful way that actually makes a difference in the world.

### ***Is there a moment in your admin journey that felt especially meaningful?***

In my role as Church Administrator, I do more than just newsletters, calendars, and phones -- I am the "face" of our church to the larger community, and have the privilege of being the first face people see (or the first voice that they hear on the phone) when they reach out for help. And that's a real honour! I remember one Monday morning when a stranger walked in, distraught because his teenage daughter had committed suicide over the weekend. Although not affiliated with our church, he sensed that this would be a "safe" place to go for help. Holding space for a grief that large taught me that great love and great pain can both be true at the same time -- a lesson I have carried with me in life, as well as in my work.



***What made you realize there was a need for a peer-led group for administrators?***

During the first few years of working with the North Shore Unitarian Church, I saw our Minister, Music Director, and Director of Family Ministries gain incredible support through their professional groups. But I wasn't aware of any such groups for Administrators until I learned about (and joined) the AUUA (Association of Unitarian Universalist Administrators). Joining the AUUA connected me to more than 300 of my peers, and provided me with a resource library of materials that help me do my job better. Over time, I began volunteering with the AUUA, eventually becoming their Membership Coordinator and serving on their Board. But it saddened me to discover that only a few Canadian UU Admins are AUUA members. So I decided to launch a peer-led chat to network with my Canadian colleagues. My goal is two-fold: FIRST, I wanted to provide a venue where Canadian UU Admins can network with each other to address issues that we all face; SECOND, I wanted to make Canadian Admins aware of the many benefits of AUUA membership.

***What was your vision when you first started the group?***

My hope was that the Administrators' Chat would provide space for Canadian UU Admins to meet in order to share resources, support, and tips that will help us all do our jobs better. Originally, the plan was to meet quarterly -- but the group collectively agreed to meet monthly instead. We brainstormed a list of topics we'd like to cover at future meetings (a list that keeps growing!) -- and at the end of each session we agree together on what the topic will be for our next meeting. We are developing our own Google Drive that contains some of the materials and resources we discuss, including recordings of our prior meetings. I think we all enjoy a sense of connection with the other participants, and find the meetings well worth an hour of our time each.

***How has being part of this peer community supported you personally or professionally?***

Peers understand each other in a way that others cannot -- and Administrators are no exception. I leave our meetings feeling encouraged about the sense of community we have fostered and the information we have shared. Our meetings provide a safe space for Admins to voice concerns and questions. We share tips and tricks, and help brainstorm solutions to problems we face. I learn something new each time we meet -- and am also often able to share something that helps others. It's a win-win for us all!

***What do you hope admins feel when they join for the first time?***

I want people to feel welcome, seen, and heard. I want them to feel like they belong here -- that the group truly understands the joys and challenges that come with their jobs.

***What's one thing you've learned from other admins that has stayed with you?***

That we need each other. When I have a question or problem, someone else has solutions -- and vice versa. There's a give-and-take. By supporting each other, we help ourselves too!

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***What would you say to admins who haven't been attending?***

Our Chat is only 1 hour per month -- and it's free! -- but that 1 hour leads to huge benefits by connecting your Admin to their peers across Canada to share wisdom, encouragement, and professional development tips. We don't know what we don't know -- but by connecting with peers, we open ourselves up to learning new things that we may not have even realized we needed.

***What gives you the most hope about how admins can collaborate across Canada?***

Collectively, we are a kind, creative, smart, resourceful community. We live and work in 5 different time zones across this vast country -- and work for churches large and small. But what unites us is that we understand the unique joys and concerns of working for UU churches. By meeting together, we open up for both personal and professional growth, making our jobs more rewarding and successful.

***If you could share one piece of wisdom with new or isolated admins...***

You are not alone. Join us by signing up here: <https://nsuc.breezechms.com/form/cf4adb>.

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