

Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees, September 2017

Our church year is off to a wonderful start. Many new programs are in place and our homecoming service was well attended followed by an excellent Expo.

In this report I will assess the current position to the three ends stated below and our capacity to achieve these ends by June 2018.

1.

AMONG: TUCW is a community of welcome and support for members, friends, and visitors on their spiritual journeys. We celebrate lives of generosity and responsibility sharing our time, resources and talents to sustain our vibrant religious community.

Current position: I see this as two ends; the first is creating a community of support for our congregants on their spiritual journeys. Currently, we provide a worship service that does this very well. Inspiring music, ritual and preaching both comforts and challenges our congregants. Our programming is nominally effective; we have recently staffed our lifespan faith development program to more adequately address the needs of our children and youth. Our adult program has increased in scope and effectiveness; we now have several meditation groups, a new men's spirituality group and other classes directed towards spiritual growth. Our second sub-end refers to further enculturating a sense of generous stewardship in support of our congregation. Here we have really just begun. Our Stewardship Team is hardworking but small compared to the task at hand. New fundraisers such as the Year End Appeal are largely staff driven. There is not a prevalent culture of generosity and thankfulness among our members as a whole. During the last pledge drive some members of the community threatened to "weaponized their pledges" in order to secure more funding for their program. This is not a sign of a generous culture.

Capacity: Sub-end; supporting spiritual journeys. I see about a third more spiritual based programming as possible. We need to better integrate our lifespan faith development program into the overall ministry of the church. We have no paid adult program staff person. Ultimately, an assistant or associate minister would best achieve this end.

Sub-end; enculturating generosity. Here we could double in effectiveness. Our Stewardship Team needs to be expanded and we need to train for success. Our Leadership Development efforts need to be expanded greatly because generous leaders enculturate a generous congregation. We need to encourage a culture of thankfulness and celebration as part of this growth.

2.

WITHIN: TUCW is where the lives of children, youth and adults of all ages are deepened spiritually in worship that guides them in individual and communal responses to the sacred, enriched through expanded religious understanding, and moved, uplifted and sustained by living out UU principles.

Current position: This end refers to a deepened sense of the spiritual as it is achieved in worship. I actually consider this to be a significant strength for us compared to many UU congregations. We do sometimes lack a sense of spontaneity and joy in our worship service. Our music remains largely focused on European composers and there is controversy over clapping, which some find spiritual and others do not. Our Worship Associates program and the use of an Intern Minister has allowed us to experiment with worship. This past year I trained our Worship Associates in preaching and they led most of our summer worship quite successfully. Our participation in the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport and the Interfaith Coalition of Westport has led to a wider religious understanding. We have a very limited involvement with the UUA which would expand our understanding of UU Principles, other than my efforts to bring outside UU ministers here to speak.

Capacity: This end suggests that there is room to expand our multigenerational modality of worship to include children and youth beyond the occasional multigenerational services (what we call "All Church Worship). Both the Children Program and Youth Program Co-coordinators will be expanding worship for their age groups this year. We have significant capacity to expand our interfaith worship and education opportunities. Sharing worship with our partner church in Bridgeport and my co-teaching an inter-faith theology class at Temple Israel this fall are examples of how we can expand this work. We could easily double our UUA involvement encouraging members to go to UUA sponsored worship trainings, regional meetings and General Assembly and to bring back those ideas to worship.

3.

BEYOND: TUCW opens possibilities for everyone to act meaningfully and visibly to promote justice and equality. Beyond our walls, we pursue justice and equality courageously through bold individual and congregational actions to help heal the world.

Current Position: This is one of our strongest areas of ministry. Having a dedicated Social Justice Director has helped us to become known for our social justice ministry. David's use of media outreach has been excellent.

Capacity: We have the capacity to fine tune our actions towards promoting equality and healing. We could grow by another quarter in bold and congregational actions in social justice. Our capacity is only limited by the number of volunteers we have to lead the charge.

I look forward to sharing my plan on how we will realize each of these ends in the months ahead.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse