



Remarks from Luke Garvey, President of the Board of Trustees

January 31, 2021

The Unitarian Church in Westport

Good morning! I'm Luke Garvey, President of your Board of Trustees. The Board is the group of 9 elected congregants whose job it is to oversee the running and well-being of the church. We work under a structure adopted several years ago called "Policy-Based Governance". The shortest definition I've heard of this is: "Delegate – and mean it." Here's a quote from our Constitution:

- All power to act, unless otherwise specifically delegated in this Constitution, shall reside with the Congregation's Membership
- Responsibility for proposing goals, establishing policies, and monitoring their implementation shall reside with the Elected Board of Trustees.
- The Senior Minister, called by the Congregation, shall be responsible for the implementation of those goals and policies as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and shall also supervise the staff.

So: YOU'RE the boss, the ultimate authority. The Board, whom you have chosen, establishes goals and policies, and monitors them.

Reverend Morehouse is the "CEO". To him falls virtually all execution. This is not nearly as interesting as in the Middle Ages, when this involved actual executions. We the Board set direction, Rev. John works out how to meet those goals and ends, and we monitor efforts and progress, and try to see that he has the resources to do this. We offer direction, guidance, sometimes course corrections, but how he does his job, within reasonable limits, is up to him.

All of this is introduction to the **top two priorities** that have been agreed on for the current church year. There are many, falling under the familiar categories of Inspire, Connect, Act, but the Board has focused especially on two.

We're talking about this to keep everyone informed. and, in about a month, on February 28, we will be hosting Zoom discussions to get your best thinking about what it would look like when these ends are met.

So what are these top-priority ends that have been chosen?

1. "We become a sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations." and

2. “We live out our commitment to promoting social justice causes, especially racial justice and gender equity.”

Let’s talk for a moment about each of these:

First: Becoming a sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations

This end was first developed before the pandemic, but has risen in importance. “Sustainable” certainly has a large financial component which we all are acutely aware of as being important this year,. “growing and comprised of all generations” is vital for the continuation of our existence. . “Engaged” is pretty self-evident: We need . Your time, treasure and talent ,given over time, enthusiastically.

Second: Living out our commitment to promoting social justice causes, especially racial justice and gender equity.

This goes to the heart of who we are, and why we are together. Our very identity. Social Justice is at the core of our beliefs and actions, And two that we wanted to highlight this year given these times are racial justice and gender equity.

I’d like to give you an update on our efforts and activities in each of these two areas:

Sustainable, engaged, growing:

Despite the pandemic we are making progress. We count 370 members, up slightly from 363 Jan 2020. We have 42 children and youth engaged in our Faith Formation program, which is up from 38 this time last year.

These numbers don’t show are the many friends and frequent guests who attend our services. In this virtual format these numbers are hard to measure. At our recent Bring a Friend Sunday, we had 40 new faces in our midst.

Engagement: We are more engaged now than we were when the pandemic started. We have over 54 active groups, teams and standing committees. Most congregants are active in some program. Our Soul Matters Sharing Circles has been a magnet for engagement. We’re running an introductory course for members and newcomers every other month. We expect that the recent Engagement Census from our Leadership Development Team will yield important data for us to evaluate where we are and where we need to go. Regarding families, while Nate and his team are doing a good job at keeping the connections we have, we continue to be challenged as to how to attract and engage new families.

Most UU congregations are facing the same struggle at this time; And we anticipate more growth once we return to in-person worship again.

Sustainability: We were pleasantly surprised at the number of people who stepped up to give generously for the Holiday Appeal and contributed to our CONNECT fundraiser in October. We are waiting to see how we will fare in our upcoming March pledge drive. To date, Reverend John has done an outstanding job keeping expenses lower than revenues. We are still not operating where we would like, but we hope for better.

Policy 1.3.3: “We live out our commitment to promoting social justice causes, especially racial justice and gender equity.”

We have established a Racial Justice Council. We now have 18 members who are working on teams for education, police accountability, hunger and homelessness, and a congregational resolution supporting racial justice. Since June we have run a movie group every 2 weeks to discuss black lives in America.

Our TUCWomen’s Group is sponsoring a book discussion group and they are planning a speaker series in 2021 related to racial justice. These events will be open to the general public and will be in partnership with other congregations in Westport.

A group of us has been attending an anti-racism training through Temple Israel, which will be repeated in the Spring for us. We are also involved with an anti-racism effort through the Greater Bridgeport Council of Churches which we are joining in the Spring.

110 of our members have provided just over 10,000 lunches to the homeless under the John Street Bridge.

We have completed training to begin administering the Intercultural Development Inventory to our congregation in 2021. Members of the Board are taking this on right now.

In our work towards Gender Equity, we held a powerful service on transgender identity and we plan on presenting a service on women’s rights soon. We sponsored a vigil for RBG and a virtual Women’s March in October, both of which drew in over 80 people attending from across the county. We have established a strong connection with the Triangle Center in Norwalk committed to LGBTQ+ rights. Unfortunately we have had to cancel our OWL classes because of the pandemic. OWL is a very effective program for teaching women’s rights and transgender equity.

On another social justice note: Our UU the Vote team of 40+ volunteers sent out thousands of postcards, texts, and made hundreds of phone calls to get out the vote in key battleground states, and later, in Georgia.

But there is a lot more new kinds of work we might be doing to fulfill these priorities, especially as we start to gear up for a post-pandemic world. Here's the punchline: We need to hear from you: **When life gets back to "normal" what does engaged mean to you? Growing? What does a commitment to Social Justice work look like?**

So what we are asking of each of you is to think over these priorities. Then, on February 28th, we look forward to your participating in moderated discussions to provide your vision and ideas on what these could look like in the coming year, transitioning to a post-COVID world. Help us paint the picture, and then let's continue our work to get it done.