

## Senior Minister's Board Report

December 2021

*Report on End 1.3.1 – “Build authentic relationships with people across all differences”*

We continue to make progress on this end. In May of 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic I outlined several shifts that I saw occurring both in responding to the pandemic and in our larger Unitarian Universalist movement as seek to build authentic relationships:

1. *Shift from analog to digital.* We are much farther along in this regard than we were 18 months ago. We have invested in over \$10,000 in new broadcast equipment and we are now fully staffed in paid staff (David Vita is close to half time as Tech Manager and Desmond Hughes is quarter time as Tech Specialists). We still have only about half the staff we need in volunteers as we continue to reach out to people virtually. We now have people from all over the country zooming into our worship services. In addition, we have a number of other followers who live in Bridgeport whose organizations we follow and support, most notably April Barron's non-profit, Helping Hands. We have more work to do in the next 18 months as we add a new sound board and train new volunteers to run equipment. David Vita and I are working on a recruitment and training program. We also need to incorporate our AV equipment into the infrastructure of the church which we will do in future renovations. Technology will be our primary means of reaching out to new generations; beyond our broadcast capabilities, we are spending funds on updating the Meeting House in broadband capability and equipment.
2. *Shift from teaching to equipping.* As a liberal congregation we are learning that we do not need to teach our way to those who join us or those we work with. Rather we need to equip people to learn and grow. We have had six new families join our congregation in the last several months. As we continue to move away from the “religious education” model of didactic learning to a more immersive experiential model of “faith formation” we will continue to give multi-racial and multi faith families what they need to make sense of the world. Our embrace of the Soul Matters Program is critical to this shift. SM provides our educators, small groups and worship leaders with new ways to equip families to grow in faith.
3. *Shift from gathering to connecting.* The shift from simply coming together for events is being augmented with deeper opportunities for connection including small groups, classes and connecting to the larger UUA. This has proven to be a fruitful endeavor. Our Racial Justice Council and Gender Equity Teams incorporate deep listening in smaller groups in most of their meetings, helping to draw people who are different together. In Family Faith Formation, the primary purpose of our children's programs is connecting the kids together in games, sharing and song. Heather Hamilton has used the Children's Chapel to great effect. We are seeing the results of this effort in several new families with mixed racial backgrounds. More needs to be done in this regard.

4. *Shift from Global to Local.* We are striving to follow communities of color who are working towards change. This is a new direction for us. Rather than celebrate the UN or other international agency, we are building connections with local organizations such as the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport.

Conclusion: There is more we need to do. When we show up to follow and help, we will attract people different than ourselves. Beth's work in reaching out through various media is making a difference. All of this means that we are changing from being an insulated enclave of liberal values to living our values out into the world. I do believe this shift is at the heart of all the energy around our name change. What I have heard is that we want to not only reflect who we are but who we want to be across differences. The world is rapidly changing. It will be up to all of us to meet those changes head on.

Respectfully Submitted, Rev. Dr. John Morehouse