

**Report to the Board of Trustees**  
for the 12/19/2023 meeting  
Rev. Alan Taylor

**Status of Transition Ministry**

I've just completed four months with TUUCW. I am grateful to the board to meet with me in a "mini-retreat" where I shared the fundamentals of conflict transformation. It was a privilege to facilitate a session of sharing of one another's experience. The opportunity for honest, open sharing as well as deep listening was helpful before re-affirming the board covenant. I think it is a wise choice to share the board covenant at the beginning of each meeting.

I look forward to exploring how the Shared Transitional Ministry efforts line up in relationship with the Board and with the Transition Team. I'm grateful that more members with whom I've been unfamiliar with have talked with me about their hopes and concerns. The greatest concerns continue to be with processes that engage the input of the wider congregation, as well as a concern that many people are so comfortable with an outlier status that they don't become engaged. And those who do jump into the fray have often found themselves frustrated with a system that doesn't value new ideas.

**Reporting on the End Statements**

**TUUCW is where the lives of children, youth, and adults of all ages are embraced in a community of spirit and love where they can open themselves to pastoral care in times of joy, sorrow and transition, and are committed to the well-being of one another [1.1.2]**

This past month, Angi Haen as the Acting Lead for Family Faith Formation, has identified that one aspect of our current program is out of compliance with our safety policies. It is expected that two adults will be with children in the classroom; however, three teens have been paid to be teachers. She is identifying how best to rectify this situation.

I haven't taken any steps as of yet to create a Search Committee for the permanent position for Faith Formation. It behooves the congregation to have a Search Committee to assess the needs of the current program through meeting with parents and learning what they hope for the program. The assessment also determines the scope of the position. I may need support from the board in recruiting this team. Angi cannot do so since she may apply for the position.

**TUUCW is a community of welcome and support for members, friends, and visitors on their spiritual journeys. We embrace a culture of diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance, where we treat each other with loving kindness and mutual respect, working together to resolve any conflicts with love and compassion. [1.2.1]**

The Membership Committee headed by Jerusha Vogel is developing a Pathway to Connection series that draws from Starting Point, the curriculum developed by Scott Tayler in Soul Matters, and the Pathway to Membership curriculum I developed at Unity Temple. This begins with an Intro to UU Westport with the Minister, then a 2-session Pathway to Connection, followed by a potluck where visitors are invited to sign the membership book, and finally participation in a Welcoming Sunday that will occur twice a year. The structure of this “pathway” to membership is included as an appendix to this report.

Ten visitors have now attended Intro to UU Westport. Jim Cooper and David Keaton led the first Pathways to Connections and will in time recruit other members outside the Membership Committee to facilitate. We will hold the two sessions of Pathways to Connection on January 7 and 14.

The Communications Team created publicity for the Holiday gatherings, beginning with the December 10 choir concert going through the December 31st Sunday service. One of my Minister Messages encouraged members to share both electronic and hard copies of this flyer with friends and family, as many people make their first connection with a spiritual home during the winter holidays.

To support the administrative Jenna McPartland and Julyen Norman currently provide a great service to the congregation through offering hospitality at coffee hour. They intentionally offer only vegan options. They spend their own money and make coffee hour a much more welcoming place for conversation. They understand that others may wish to host coffee hour with non-vegan items, and they are happy to step aside when others would like to do so.

It came to my attention that others who brought things to share at coffee hour were asked not to share them because their offering was not vegan. I have spoken with the Transition Team about how to engage the conflict creatively, using the tools shared in Transforming Conflict. This shall be a good test case to get people to share what is important to them about food, sharing food, and the nature of our community. In the process, we identify the values—and competing values—at play and how best to honor the competing values. This conversation hopefully will support the board in developing policies, if need be.

The Committee on Ministry will be integral to the Conflict Transformation work of the Congregation. It currently is attending to a few conflicts, including a request to provide a process observer at a committee where there is internal conflict.

To support the Shared Transitional Ministry, the Adult Faith Formation has added *Transforming Conflict* by Terasa Cooley as a Congregational Read, encouraging the congregation to read both *Transforming Conflict* and the UU Denominational Read: *On Repair and Repentance* by Danya Ruttenberg.

I recently met with Terasa Cooley, the author of *Transforming Conflict*. She is game to come to Westport next fall for a Saturday workshop and to lead worship. (She is in high demand and booked through the spring. She also believes congregations that engage with her work for several months prior get much more out of her workshop.) Furthermore, Terasa is willing to open up her schedule to provide me with monthly coaching. She is quite familiar with this congregation and currently serves as the interim minister in Columbus. I will likely need additional funds as she charges \$250 a session and \$1000 for five sessions pre-paid.

As I've shared before, the goals of Conflict Transformation are:

- To help us understand how our own minds and bodies respond to conflict—and learn new ways of responding
- To develop skills for responding to conflict in relationships in a healthy and productive manner
- To understand the cycles of conflict and systems in congregational life
- To develop Congregational practices in which conflict can be treated as an opportunity for growth rather than a crisis of division

The specific practices that we will seek to cultivate are:

**Live in Shared Covenant** — Agree on what we promise one another

**Cultivate deep listening skills** among a growing number of members

**Increase individual awareness of reactivity** & how trauma lives in our bodies

**Hold spaces, small and large, where people share honestly and openly**

Create brave space, seeking to make all spaces safe

Intentionally include all voices, especially those not dominant

**Open conversations** on how white privilege contributes to our behaviors and how power differentials exist in relationships — and how we can change

**We become a financially sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations [1.2.4]**

The Stewardship Committee assembled the Holiday Appeal that I penned, encouraging members to give an end-of-the-year gift. I look forward to discussing the Stewardship Committee's plan for the new year to hold multiple gatherings in people's homes where members can share in a social setting what is important to them about the congregation. No ask for money will be made at these gathering but instead an articulation of values. I will attend each of these along with a couple board members. These listening gatherings will prime the congregation for the Annual Fund Drive.

Given the Stewardship Committee currently has only two members, I fully support the board's request to find additional members.

As Brian Lasher chairs the Financial Sustainability work of the board and congregation, I enjoy providing a supporting role. The level of conversation is thoughtful and appears to me to be very healthy.

A Holiday Appeal was mailed out to the congregation on December 11th. I trust that many members with the means to give an additional gift to the congregation will do so. It is a simple, direct request.

### **Capital Campaign Construction Team Update**

On November 19, about 25 people attended the congregational meeting. I suspect the length of the service impacted the number of attendees. It was clear that the congregation values a process to determine how to move forward. I will share the minutes of the meeting with both the Board and our newly assembled Capital Campaign Construction Team: John Turmelle, Jay Lubin, Rob Laug, Holly Jaffee, and Elena Rockman-Blak.

A most pressing challenge is to develop a process for the congregation to share input about the planned Capital Campaign construction. It will be my role to oversee the Capital Campaign Construction Team to do their work. But this work cannot begin until the Congregation has been engaged in a process to hear from them. It appears to me to be the role of the board to monitor this process. To ensure a good process, the Board may want to ask either the soon-to-be-created Conflict Transformation Team or the Transition Team to be of support. This is a great opportunity for members to work together to create a healthy process.

Appendix

## **Pathways to Connection: Overview**

Each Pathways to Connection step builds on the preceding step with increasing levels of participant commitment. Individuals may "opt out" at any step of the process. The intent of this program is to provide in-depth information which may lead to the significant decision of Connection in the congregation.

### **STEP 1 - WHO WE ARE: Introduction to Unitarian Universalism**

This is an introductory session conducted by the Minister and involving a member of the Connection Committee. The focus is to provide information about the

history of Universalism and Unitarianism as well as the background of UTUUC, the congregation and the building. Discussion will also explore U principles, practices, beliefs and values. This session is a prerequisite for the other three steps of the Pathway to Connection.

## **STEP 2 -PATHWAYS to CONNECTION - A TWO-PART CLASS**

### **Session 1: WHO ARE YOU?**

The two Pathways to classes are conducted by Pathways to Connection facilitators. The first session has a primary focus on exploring the religious odysseys of the participants. Stressed will be the wide diversity of prior religious experiences of the participants.

### **Session 2: WHO CAN WE BE TOGETHER?**

Under the leadership of the facilitators, the participants will hear more about the local congregation and its programs. Participants will identify their personal attitudes about religion and spirituality; preferences for worship services and a host of other topics and share them with other group members.

## **STEP 3 - CELEBRATION POTLUCK**

The final step is designed to formalize participants' relationships with the congregation. At a potluck meal, individuals are given the opportunity to sign the Membership Book. The potluck should take place about 2-3 weeks after the last session of "Who Can We Be Together?", in order to give individuals time to process the program

## **STEP 4 - WELCOMING SUNDAY**

Those who have completed the program and signed the Membership Book are then invited to a Welcoming Ceremony by the congregation. The Welcoming Ceremony takes place twice a year, and is presented at both services. Welcoming Sunday culminates with a family-style supper in Unity House.