

**Report to the Board of Trustees**  
for the 1/16/23 meeting  
Rev. Alan Taylor

**Personal Bereavement Request**

I am grateful for the opportunity to let go of my responsibilities during the first week of January, following the death of my mother, and the opportunity to work remotely this coming weekend. Her Celebration of Life was held January 6. I returned to working on January 8 while staying in Bakersfield to support my father whose health has declined so much that he must enter a senior living facility. Given that I am staying in Bakersfield longer than anticipated, I talked with Luke about working remotely the five days I would have been in Westport, including the evening of the board meeting. This allows me to attend my father, my parents' affairs, and my own family before returning to Westport in person. I appreciate Luke's assurance that he cannot imagine anyone begrudging me this change in plans.

**Status of Transition Ministry**

Five months with TUUCW, and I am now much clearer on how to move forward on the arc of Shared Transitional Ministry.

I'm delighted the Board has empowered me to launch a Conflict Transformation Team that will report to the Board. It includes two Board Members, two COM Members, and two Transition Team Members: Brian Lasher and Jen Gerometta from the Board. Lisa Olivieri and Monica Garrison from COM, and Cheryl Dixon-Paul and Randy Burnham from the Transition Team. It will be chaired by Linda Lubin, and I will serve as an ex officio member.

The Conflict Transformation Team could easily be called the Relationship Repair Team. Their work is largely relational—and critical to the success of doing the structural work of a Governance/Decision-making Team. I urge the board to hold off on moving forward with this second team until the congregation is well into the healing work of the Conflict Transformation. I include as an addendum a proposed charge for the team developed by the sub-committee with Brian Lasher and Jen Gerometta. To set the stage for this work, I have invited the wider congregation to join me for three different dates to view an extremely helpful YouTube video by Brene Brown entitled "B.R.A.V.I.N.G = The Seven Pillars of Trust." The language of this video and the framework provided by Terasa Cooley in *Transforming Conflict*, a Congregational Read for UU Westport this winter, will provide a strong foundation for the work of the Conflict Transformation Team.

Rev. Terasa Cooley, the author of *Transforming Conflict*, has offered to work with UU Westport March 23-24. I recommend that on Saturday, she meets with the board, the

staff, and the Transition and Conflict Transformation Teams (not yet clear whether separately, overlapping, or all together) and on Sunday leading an afternoon congregational workshop after she preaches in the morning. Her fee is \$250/hour or a maximum of \$2000/weekend plus expenses. I request affirmation to spend this amount for her guidance.

The Adult Faith Formation Team is identifying how best to promote widespread reading of her book *Transforming Conflict*. Between them, the staff, and the Transition Team, over 30 copies are already circulating.

## **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 brought the program into compliance with our safety policies. Two adults (no longer one adult with a paid teen) will be with children in the classrooms.

The time the youth group has changed from 11:30am to 10am. Angi is trying new approaches to increase participation in the youth group given the low participation of the past few months. They may be more likely to come with their parents than come after the service without their parents.

I still haven't taken any steps to create a Search Committee for the permanent Faith Formation position. 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 need support from the board in recruiting this team.

Christmas Eve services were held at 10am and 9pm. A surprising 70-80 people came to the morning service, with many newcomers, including many children. At 9pm, it was a joy to participate in the beautiful traditional service coordinated by Rev. Ed Thompson and meet many young adults who grew up in the congregation.

On December 24th, I visited Lynda and Paul Bluestein and learned much more about the history of the congregation. On January 4th, Lynda passed away in Vermont, and I shared the news with the congregation. There will be no memorial service at their request. I am reflecting on how best to gather people to share memories of Lynda with me for the sake of members being able to grieve her death.

**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]**

After three meetings with facilitators of Soul Matters and Small Group Ministry, the Sunday service on January 21 will announce the re-launch of our Soul Matters program. Soul Matters provides participants an opportunity to share openly about one's own experience related to a theme, to cultivate deep listening skills, and to literally listen one another into deeper wisdom. This deeply relational spiritual practice serves as the signature small group of many UU congregations, and I trust it will expand at UU Westport.

The Membership Committee's Pathways to Connection series was interrupted by the cancellation of worship on January 7. Part II will be held on January 14 for the many people waiting for it, and Part I will be held on January 21.

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

Sue O'Meara reports to me that December brought in much more into the coffers than expected. \$104,000 of pledges came in. Clearly people responded well to their statements. Collectively, three family foundations sent an additional \$15,000 in gifts. Of the \$487K pledged, 60% of this has now been collected. She reports that a couple large donors haven't yet paid their pledges but that they surely will. The Holiday Appeal brought in \$11,000, \$4K short of what was budgeted, while a couple members shared that they intend to give on top of their pledges. The Holiday Boutique jewelry sale brought in \$3,771, shy of the \$7,600 as last year because they didn't have the number of gold pieces of jewelry. So this year with the Tag Sale bringing in over \$14,700, the fundraising line item of expected income has been exceeded. In December alone, the Minister's Discretionary Fund collected \$1,700 and \$2,500 for the Music Fund. The year-to-date income is \$453K while it was budgeted \$412K, so we're ahead year-to-date income by \$41,000.

The Stewardship Committee shall 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 at least one board member. 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.

### **An Unexpected Liability**

A group of four families requested to rent a classroom in the Meeting House. A licensing agreement was drafted. Steve Grathwohl consulted the zoning and building departments to ensure that we wouldn't have any liability. It turns out a 1999 resolution precludes TUUCW from renting the Meeting House to outside groups. The building department assures us this is indeed the latest resolution. This means the congregation has been renting the Meeting House against zoning regulations since 1999.

At this point, Ruth and I have agreed that the Meeting House is no longer open to outside rentals unless the renter is willing to engage the process of getting a special permit or until someone in the Congregation can navigate the process of getting a new resolution in front of the zoning board to allow us to rent to outside groups. This will have a relatively small impact on our income.

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

John Turmelle and Jay Lubin shared a report of estimated costs of the current proposed work and various options. Please see this report appended. The estimate of the currently proposed work is \$696,000, more than what the congregation has on hand. They request some clarity on what budget can be counted on.

The team may share the cost of these options on January 28th, but there is currently a lack of clarity how best to move forward. A most pressing challenge is to develop a process for the congregation to share input about the planned Capital Campaign construction. Both Beth and Ravi have agreed to help to provide Board support in ensuring this process moves forward.

### **Addendum - Conflict Transformation Team Charge**

Conflict Transformation Team Charge

Goals of Conflict Transformation Engagement

- 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.

— taken from *Conflict Transformation* by Terasa Cooley

Focus Area	Comments	Potential Deliverable
How might we view conflict not as a problem to be managed or resolved but as an opportunity to strengthen our common life?	Is it possible to engage conflict creatively? Why is it important now to transform conflict in the life of our congregation, our society and ourselves?	Provide opportunities for small group listening and dialogue sessions about our understanding and perspective of conflict. Provide a summary of these sessions to the congregation earlier in your process to spur commitment.
How might we think about any imbedded systemic issues that cause conflict at UU Westport?	Congregations can develop ingrained habits that inhibit healthy relationships between members and between members and ministers.	After discussion and research, a short report initially published via link in Soundings discussing cycles of conflict and systems at UU Westport.
How might we think about engaging the congregation?	After completing these first two focus areas, how can we get people to process and learn?	After each report is shared, gather the congregation and ask them how these reports “land” with them: do they see the congregation this way, how do they feel about it.
How might we think about congregational and personal habits that could potentially transform conflict?	To develop practices in which conflict can be treated as an opportunity for growth—thereby strengthening our imagination and creativity and reducing our anxiety.	Development of mini workshops in coordination with Chaplains, Committee on Ministry, Board, and others that discuss recommendations, guidelines, etc. to develop a culture of listening, learning and risk taking.
How might we think about consultants to help us with conflict transformation?	Possible resources are UUA’s Hope for Us, the Lombard Peace Center, and/or perhaps others	Return a recommendation on how to use or not use consultants in this process.
How might we think about the Covenant of Right Relations and its current efficacy for us?	Are we treating each other as if we are saying to one another: you are not alone, you are enough, you are	Return a recommendation concerning the Covenant.
How might we think about generational, cultural, wealth, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic aspects in our	Deeply held value systems can exist between various groups. How might that impact potential conflicts?	Embed and acknowledge any perspectives and recommendations in the mini-workshops, reports, or recommendations.