

Report to the Board of Trustees
The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport
for the 3/19/24 meeting
Rev. Alan Taylor

Status of Shared Transitional Ministry

I informed the Board president that I am available and willing to renew my contract for another year with the request that I receive a small raise and/or have a clause that allows for additional professional expenses if my expenses exceed the amount budgeted.

Policy Reflections

Ends

1.2.1 **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.

To support the work of conflict transformation, the Adult Faith Formation and Transforming Conflict Teams hosted nine conversations about our Congregational Read: *Transforming Conflict* by Rev. Terasa Cooley. Two of these were held with the chaplains, one with the board, and the other seven were made available to the entire congregation. Over 40 people participated. These conversations were held in anticipation of Rev. Terasa Cooley's visit on March 23-24.

1.2.3 **We celebrate** lives of generosity and responsibility sharing our time, resources and talents to sustain our vibrant religious community. 1.2.4 **We become** a financially sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations.

In the current budget, pledged income covers only 85% of staff salaries. An increase of 15% would be about \$75K. The Annual Fund Drive commenced this past month with a sermon that called congregants to consider the spiritual progressive tithe—giving a percentage of their income to the congregation and a total of ten percent of their income to organizations that live out their values.

At the recent Congregational meeting, the Congregation approved the use of \$175K of the endowment as a match for another \$175K for a quick gathering of funds to complete the Capital Campaign Construction. It was made clear that any gifts to this effort are over and above a generous pledge to the operating budget. It is a bold ask to seek additional pledges of \$250K from members this spring.

1.3.3 **Live out** our commitment to promoting social justice causes, especially racial justice and gender equity.

The Social Justice Council approved a proposal by David Vita that the coming year's budget include \$7,200 to compensate him 5 hours/week in his role as Legislative Advocacy Coordinator. Because other UU congregations are not in a position to join UU Westport in creating a State Action Network, the Social Justice Council recommends that \$7,200 of the Jan Park endowment fund be used to support UU Westport's collective legislative advocacy efforts led by David Vita. I recommend that this work be treated as a paid consultant rather than an employee; however, Sue O'Meara raises the question whether a former employee can be treated as a consultant.

Governance Process Policies

Regarding fiduciary committees:

Currently, only Kim Fuchs and Deb Garskof serve on the Human Relations Committee, the existence of which is called for in the board policies. I request that Sharon Poole be appointed to this committee that operations as a Human Relations Advisory Team to the senior minister.

Currently only Elena Rockman-Blake and Sam Somashekar serve on the Year Round Stewardship Committee. I welcome recommendations of who to request to serve on it.

Limitations

3.2.2. Fail to establish, publicize and follow written policies for processing Congregant grievances and suggestions.

Currently, the congregation does not have clear processes for engaging and resolving Congregant grievances. The Safe Congregation Team deals with issues where people's safety are at risk. The Committee on Ministry has a charge to call people back into covenant when there is acting out, but the COM has not been functioning in this way during the last couple years. With the creation of the Transforming Conflict Team, there is a question whether one or both of these volunteer groups together will develop written policies and procedures for engaging future grievances.

The Congregation can cultivate stronger feedback loops for the staff and program leaders. At present, people often either complain or contact a board member about what they're unhappy about. As the board provides guidance through policy and monitoring Ends, there is ample opportunity for feedback. However, how does the senior minister receive suggestions and constructive feedback?

3.9.7. Make public statements about the position of the Congregation, if the official position is not formally adopted.

Given the banners and history of the congregation with women's rights, LGBTQIA+ issues, and Black Lives Matter engagement, I assume that the senior minister can make public statements on behalf of the Congregation. As far as I am aware, there is no formal

process by which the congregation adopts an official position. The Social Justice Council wishes to review this in the coming months.

Board-Exec relationship

In October, I informed the board that I could not oversee the process of changing the plans for the capital campaign construction if the board wanted to re-assess the priorities that were made four years ago. I was out of compliance with policy governance by expecting the board to take on this function. I did this for two reasons. I didn't think that I as a transitional minister had the capacity to take this on, and significant building projects seemed to me a function of board purview. Even though my action was out of compliance with policy governance, I believe it was the right thing to do. The result: The board did an excellent job at creating opportunities for members to share their thoughts and values regarding whether to re-assess priorities and whether to seek to raise further funds with a matching donation from the endowment. It was a complex, delicate process that was achieved with excellent process.

The policies specifically names the Senior Minister the "CEO." At times, I hear leaders refer to the Senior Minister as "the CEO" while I hear several others in the congregation bristle at this title. There is very little question who has the ultimate say, but I notice a culture of granting the Senior Minister with much more authority than I have seen in other Unitarian Universalist settings—with the dynamic of individuals seeking that I will affirm their perspective on a specific issue. While I serve here, it is my intention to have decisions made at the lowest level possible as well as facilitating conversations about how to navigate congregational life when competing values are in tension.

Board-Congregation Linkage

The monthly Bagels with the Board is making a significant difference allowing people to talk with the board. This Sunday's gathering after the service with a specific question is a wonderful opportunity for members to share. The Board has made extraordinary strides this year in addressing Board-Congregation Linkage.

In a faith community, there's no place for berating people and denigrating their integrity. A recent written communication to the board was highly disrespectful. I spoke with Rev. Terasa Cooley about this, and she plans on engaging this as a case study. Because the communication went to the board, it is more appropriate for a board member to respond than the minister.

Facilities Issues

Projects currently being attended to:

- Meeting House ramp
- Joist/beam repair outside the tech room that was eaten out by bees
- Tree trimming and removal

A Building & Grounds maintenance team has yet to be developed.

The Montessori class in the East Wing is surprisingly quiet and cheerful. This group looks forward to moving to the Meeting House as soon as it is ready.