

Transition Team Report – December 15, 2013

Hi. My name is Norma Bailey, and I am reporting as the chair of the Transition Team, a team of four people, Jim Dealing, Laura Frey, Joyce Henricks and myself, appointed by the Board to serve as the sounding board/think tank/working committee to and for our interim minister, Rev. Joe Cleveland.

One of the tasks of the team and the interim minister is to help the congregation study who we have been and who we are now, with the goal of coming to terms with our unique identity, our strengths, our needs and our challenges. To this end, we established and held cottage meetings in members' homes in late October to which we invited members and friends to share their stories. We asked what it was that brought people to the fellowship and kept them coming, what the role of the fellowship is in their lives, and what their involvement with the fellowship is.

Forty-nine of our members and friends attended these cottage meetings, a great turnout, and today we would like to share with you the "results," if you will, of those meetings. Each member of the Transition Team took thorough notes at what people said at the meetings, and then the Team has met four times since to process all that was said, looking for commonalities and our challenges.

So...here are the themes we came up with.

Both founding members and those who have come here since came – and come - because they have found here a safe community, a place and people who are welcoming, accepting, supportive and open to various beliefs and ideas, a place where they feel at home. This was the overwhelming majority of responses from the attendees, and it is a marvelous strength of this congregation!

At the same time, we are in the midst of change and transition. When Dawn Daniels, our worship director, decided to enter into the seminary, and when Nana' Kratochvil, our quarter-time consulting minister decided to retire, we, as a congregation, made the decision to enter into an interim transition period to take time to understand who we've been, who we are, and who we want to become. And, quite frankly, I don't think any of us really understood what that meant; we were pretty clueless.

However, as you know, we jumped in with both feet, guided by our interim minister, Rev. Joe, and we held this first set of cottage meetings. While the loudest message we got was that we are a warm, supportive, and welcoming community, we also now have a better understanding that there are some challenges that we're facing because of growth.

A major one is that, while we started out as primarily a congregation of adults, we have now become a multigenerational congregation with several families with children. What does it mean to be a multigenerational congregation? We're struggling with that change and are puzzled by how to do that well. Whose responsibility is the religious education (RE) program of our children? Is it only the responsibility of the RE Director and Committee, or only the parents' responsibility, or does it belong to all of us? Important questions to grapple with.

A second major challenge has to do with communication. As we grow, how do we do that well? How do we keep ourselves well-informed, to the degree that each of us wishes to be

informed, about the “doings” of the church? As we are also a very diverse congregation – by age, by beliefs, by interests, by personalities – how do we learn to communicate with one another when some of these differences clash? Important questions to grapple with.

A third major challenge is that, while all of us are thankful for the warm, supportive and welcoming community we have here, there are some who want more. They expressed a desire for social action/social justice involvement, from the children and from the adults. Yet, there was also a sense from some of, “Yes, it’s important and we want it, but let someone else do it.” We are not alone in this challenge. In the most recent UU World magazine that all of us who are members receive monthly, there is an article by Tom Schade titled “Religious Community Is Not Enough.” We would encourage you all to read it as we are certainly in the midst of figuring out who we are and who we want to be. Important questions to grapple with.

No question about this: We are in the midst of change. It’s already happened. So, how do we come to terms with these changes? How do we feel about them? How do we deal with the implications of these changes? Our answer. We have to continue to talk and discover our answers. We have to ask ourselves: What do we want to maintain? What do we want to let go? Do we have to let anything go? Ultimately, what do we want to become? And as we grow and grapple with these important questions, what different strategies will we need to learn to maintain the wonderful strengths we already have?

It’s an exciting time! We have already shown ourselves to be the kind of congregation that draws people in – from our open, welcoming stance to our outreach to the community with the Human Rights Ordinance and our engagement in the homeless shelter project. It’s these kinds of things that got Rev. Joe excited about joining us! So, right after the holidays, the Transition Team will be inviting you all to engage in more conversations to contemplate these most important questions. We hope that you will think about these questions and come with your thoughts, because everyone’s voice is wanted and needed.

We also tap the voice of our interim minister, Rev. Joe Cleveland, who has specialized training in helping congregations during this exciting period of change. So I turn it over to him!