

When Drew arrived in 2019, he needed his contract to include a commitment that we would create something called a “Committee on Shared Ministry.” He’s required to work with such a committee to finish his professional progression in ministry. So, naturally, the Board created this committee—and charged it with devising its own charge. We had no understanding of what the committee should do—or what “shared ministry” means.

As it turns out, the committee does three things: (1) support Drew in his professional development, (2) work with Drew in resolving conflicts within the fellowship, and (3) assess how well the fellowship’s various activities are meeting the needs of its members.

We *do* support Drew’s professional development. We serve as a confidential sounding board, an avenue of informal feedback to him, and we also provided a formal, written evaluation of his ministry to his mentor and his professional accrediting association.

As for our second charge—working with Drew to resolve conflicts—we have done real work this year. We studied UUA models for handling situations where disruptive behavior is discouraging others from full engagement with the fellowship. Going through eight drafts, we wrote a Board policy that gives the Committee on Shared Ministry strictly a peace-making role. We work to *call everyone back into covenant*. The covenant of UUFCM begins:

“Granting each other freedom of mind and spirit, we commit to this community of mutual care. In that spirit of caring, we pledge to be mindful when speaking of and to one another.”

Upholding the covenant is not a job for one committee. When I hurt others with mindless words, then I expect others—insofar as they are able—to gently, clearly, firmly, speak up, seeking to reestablish right relation. If we are unable to resolve an issue that way, we can refer it to the Committee on Shared Ministry.

We say that we are a community of “mutual care.” *Mutual care*: these are the words at the very heart of the promise that we make to one another.

From 0:20-0:43 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL8Dj5xOjm0>

We do not here promise to believe one thing or another thing, or anything all. We do something *harder*: We make a promise to care for each other.

Everyone is welcome here. Everyone has intrinsic worth. None of us has all the answers. But as a community, our health depends upon each of us doing our best to meet the challenge of mutual care. If, as is inevitable, we sometimes fall short, then we can be grateful to others in the community for helping us to see this and improve. Ultimately, if our behavior is damaging this fellowship of mutual care, then the elected Board can restrict our relationship to the community.

Finally, besides supporting Drew's professional development and working on conflict resolution, our third job on the Committee on Shared Ministry is to assess how well our needs are being met by our groups, committees, teams, and projects. What is going well? What could be going better? What is missing? How well are we doing, collectively, at taking care of each other? Of course, we will be scrutinizing the invaluable notes from last week's retreat.

But I confess that "shared ministry," the core idea behind all of this, was a minor revelation to me. We thought we were hiring a minister, but I woke up to the fact *that we are all here to minister* to one another. We are here to care for one another the best we can, given that we are all differently abled. Of course, we do express our care for one another in *our shared commitment to hire Drew as our minister*, to make donations that pay his salary and benefits. But we express that care in many other ways. *In a community of mutual care, we are all here as ministers*. I can't list all the ways we minister to one another through our service in this fellowship; they are so numerous and diverse.

But one way is teamwork on committees. Someone told me that they think committees are a waste of time because, in the end, nothing gets done. In fact, overall, our committees have never been so dynamic and effective as they are now. Many committees—such as the Building Team, the Worship team, and the Communications Committee—have budgets and all committees have substantial autonomy. The Board establishes policies, but much of the fellowship's real work gets done through teamwork in committees.

Even so, our board meetings have long agendas. Before each monthly meeting I send everyone an email with about a dozen attached documents. Receiving such an email in the midst of a busy week may not be a moment of profound joy. But when we get together, we light a candle, check in. We share a reading. We remind ourselves that this is not dreary, pointless paper-shuffling. We are not here to make money, or score points, or just to pass the time of day. This is the hard and yet joyful spiritual practice of caring for our community. All of the committees, all of the groups that meet throughout the week, are doing *holy work*. This is the warmth of community and the fire of commitment embodied in active care.

No one person made this happen; no one person can keep it going. UUFCEM is not inevitable; it did not have to happen; it does not have to be here; it does not have to go on. It is always the work-in-progress of many hands, many minds, and many hearts, all seeing the benefit of being together. I feel this as something precious, as very precious; *it is never to be taken for granted*. I invite you also to feel each moment we have here—listening to one another, singing or sharing sorrow—as rare and precious. I think it is like what Christians call grace.

Our hope is that human loving care can persist and even grow through pandemics and through terrifying social and economic upheaval. Sometimes, hearing of others' fears, vulnerabilities, and sorrows, we feel a real stirring of empathy. This is good, but it is never nearly enough. We must let those stirrings inspire a commitment to put our mutual care into action.