

November 2, 2019

Lisa Presley, MidAmerica Regional Consultant, Facilitator

Present: Jim Hannum, Sandy Hannum, Randy Locke, John Milano, Mona Shannon, Amber Schultz, Brian McDermott, Jenna Zeidler, Florence Caplow, Marcy Joncich, Lynn Wiley, Cindy Ingold, Debbie Rugg, Betsy Hunter, Kim Krannich, Jenny Hunt, Kristie Mercer, Carol Veit, Barbara Jauhola, Dave Sharpe, Anne Sharpe, Wendy Graves, David Gross, Claudia Gross, Lara Breeze-Troyer, Karen Folk, Barbara Hudgings, Millie Davis, Kathy Robinson, Rick Kozich, Priscilla Kron, Stu Foltz, Emily Laugesen, Kathleen Robbins, Tanja Hodges, Karla Peterson, Terri Fredrick, Jennifer Livingston, Becky Densmore, Michele Grove

Absent, but signed up: Kelly Halcom, Gail Hueting, Dave Sutton, Joe Minarik, Sean Bartell

1. Opening - a reading by Leslie Tachi...
2. Opening introduction and housekeeping led by facilitator
3. A nod to the Faithify Program.
4. Moment of Gratitude: Since 1992, our congregation has been an honor congregation for the UUA and MidAmerica region,
5. *Gil Rendle quote* – “Often, congregational leaders want to “fix their congregations, meaning correcting complaints and making it “perfect” for everyone. Instead, I suggest a healthier response: to work toward faithfulness rather than happiness. I advise them to go back to their mission statement or their understanding of their congregation’s call to ministry and develop decisions that support such a position.” Source – online paper <http://www.bmrc-online.org/FileDownload/492/IllusionCongregationalHappiness.pdf>
6. Question for the day: So how do we as a congregation, who does not have one singular belief system particularly, figure out what you are faithful to? If we stick to our mission (what we are faithful to) rather than keeping everyone happy, that is a better yardstick to use when making decisions.
7. Questions to keep in mind: When I say something or articulate an opinion/belief, think... this may be true for me, but is it true for others?
8. Question to ponder: To Whom are we Faithful and to Whom should we be accountable?
9. A brief look at the generations represented in the room: Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennials, Generation Z. Lisa’s commentary – Baby Boomers have the luxury of having grown up before 9/11 and feeling safe. Younger generations have more anxiety. Increase in level of anxiety leads to increased conflict in congregations
Question: are we going to lose this as well (keep the status quo). Challenge is for baby boomers to trust letting go to the younger generations who may do things differently.
10. Lisa referred to poem by Scott-Jones Invitation to Brave Space.
<http://www.mickyscottbeyjones.com/invitation-to-brave-space/> Together we will create brave space Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” We exist in the real world.....
11. Who does UUCUC want to be? Who do we want to be FOR? “safe” = comfortable; we need to figure out how to have hard conversations with each other – to enter brave space
12. Sometimes the reason we do not want clarity is that UU’s have a fear that if the congregation defines itself, it will define it in a way that shuts me and out I will no longer belong - there isn’t space for me. ?
13. What degree of change can we allow in our congregations that we can live with who we are.

14. Comfort and belonging are not synonymous. How do we help people belong and live with the discomfort this raises for us? "safe" = comfortable; we need to figure out how to have hard conversations with each other – to enter brave space
15. Can be uncomfortable, yet still belong
16. How do we use our vocabulary? What is mission and what is vision? What are we really talking about? The real question: what is our longer-term sense of who we want to be? And who do we want to be in this world?
17. Mission- present identity. Our Purpose: Axiomatic – is true for all UU congregations; what is it that we should be based on the fact that we are UU? and the Unique – what is it that makes us different from all other UU congregations - what the particular ways do we live this purpose out? (2 kinds of purpose) Vision is - what the congregation would look like if we are to live out what we want to be?
18. Edwin Markham - Universalist - Poem: *Outwitted*.
*He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!*
19. Small group/table activities: who were you when you joined this congregation? Who were you when you came in here? What were some of the topic issues at that time? Group Responses:
 - a. Wanting to find a spiritual home.
 - b. As we came in, economic downturn
 - c. Theme: looking for community. Move to town or need a change in churches,
 - d. 911 was an important issue at the time of someone come in
 - e. Republic control of the house/senate in the 1990's
 - f. Dealing with overseas wars
 - g. We came because of RE +. I need a place for our children and I need that support as a parent
20. Now, who are you now and how has that changed since you came to UUCUC? What was different? What was the same? What did you learn?
 - a. We are more worried about the world and where it is going. People need a place where people can feel safe or at least a place where we can all worry together.
 - b. There is a need to balance the different needs as the congregation grows. It is exciting to see growth but it is more difficult to balance the variety of needs.
 - c. I needed support when I came in. Now I have more support to provide. I want to provide some support that my younger self could use or would have wanted
 - d. Empty nester - it is good to turn your energy to those who need you.
 - e. Too late to change climate change completely - we are being radicalized. For a lot of young people, we are being radicalized by capitalism dropping its mask.
 - f. Things are scary. I hope we can be careful that we do not think Unitarian Universalism is the only way. Yet, there are others outside of UU that also have a valuable voice.
 - g. Also talk about the importance of all of us looking after our own mental health.
 - h. We all shared times that this church supported us during struggles, loss. Appreciate that there is hope in spite of the grief and loss and discouragement.
 - i. We place priority on people over divinity – our way is to treat all others with love; we don't know their story. We are all on a path together.
21. This does not mean that your current mission statement is wrong. Does our statement have enough boundary that we are saying 'no' to? Where do we draw the line? If we do

not draw some lines, then how good is our “yes?” There is nothing wrong with our current mission statement words. We need a little more clarity. What are the values under our statement and how to say yes and how to say no? A more clear statement will guide us better idea of where to put our energy, our focus.

22. The more people who joins, add more dreams and more possibilities.
23. We as a culture do not do well with grief and loss. We can hold hope, when hope is hard to find (Come Sing a Song with me UU hymn song lyrics). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ik-fLHEHKKQ>
24. <http://www.mickyscottbeyjones.com/invitation-to-brave-space/>

Lunch (Red Herring)

23. After lunch, began by looking at commonalities from the Dream Team surveys. One major, common theme –community.

24. Dream Buffet - looking at commonalities across results. Caring community is an axiomatic purpose – true for all congregations across all values and religious principles. Other themes: We try to find our best selves; service, change social injustices. We are rooted in the past, but not held captive by our past.

25. Small group exercise: UUCUC’s ‘scripture’. What is the holy underpinning, the holy bedrock which lays the foundation from UUCUC exists. This activity will help explain most of why we are and who you are by the stories we tell. “Once upon a time...”. Small group activities. As everyone tells their story, listen to the themes in the stories. Sharing... what are some of the stories and where did these stories intersect?

- . Once upon a time there was UU congregation with a youth group, great teachers, some difficulties engaging youth. We watched them grow up and one of the last things they did was to put on the holiday pageant all by themselves. They bent gender rules... boy Mary, girl Joseph - two years before the congregation became welcoming. Some were struggling with their own sexual identity and this was the best thing ever.
- a. Once upon a time our music department was made primarily of old dead white men (the composers). Many liked it and many did not. Now it has broadened and now you never know what will happen on Sunday.
- b. Once upon a time, there was a church in our community who had a fire. The 3-5 graders got down to the work, no committee meetings, made cranes, donated \$2000+. The adults followed the kids to make a difference.
- c. Once upon a time there was a church who had 4 ministers in 5 years and it broke us open and showed us who we are.
- d. Once upon a time there was a country who had a terrible election. This congregation found support and opened up our doors to others also looking for support .
- e. Once upon a time there was a UU church that was growing. The minister and some folks thought 2 services would be good. This was a big change, there was a lot to consider. And it was the best of times and the worst of times. There were people that did not get cared for, there was harm. We still have ghosts in our closets from this experience. Do we have trust that we can work through our differences and do it differently?
- f. Once upon a time, there was a church in great conflict within itself and with other congregations and members were in conflict with one another. We had a spoken practice called Joys and Concerns where each person could speak. Some of

these went on forever and some were dreadful. Now that church has a practice named Joys and Sorrows during which we sing, light a candle and it is written and read by the minister... a very different, soothing unifying practice.

- g. Once upon a time, this church stood behind a member as they needed public support about church and state. (Vashti McCollum school prayer case)
- h. Once upon a time, our church seemed mostly intellectual than emotional but now there is more balance and we sing our children to RE classes.
- i. Once upon a time, this congregation has acted in solidarity with BL Matters, Immigration and other organizations.
- j. Once upon a time, there was a church that lost a music director to a very sad suicide and it was not addressed very openly. Now, worship and other areas have open discussion and ways to worship and grieve together on this topic.
- k. Once upon a time, way back in the 1960's this church was divided on the issues of the Vietnam War. The church itself survived but they then had a fear that if we took a stand, it would divide us again. So for a long time, we would not take a stand on any social justice issues. Gradually we created a Social Concerns committee, but it was always the Social Action committee that supported. Finally, we moved from supporting individual stands to making our own UUCUC stands. Then we dealt with Welcoming Congregation program and it was a 3-year process with lots of anxiety and conflict. We lost 7 members to this vote. But the vote moved favorably and now we are officially a welcoming congregation. Conflict is not tearing us apart as it used to.
- l. Once upon a time, there was a congregation that through good and troubled budgets, supported the UUA/district/region for 25 years. And we continued to support even when many did not fully understand what these organizations did.
- m. Once upon a time, there was a minister looking for a job. She had a lot of contact with different search committees, but one search committee really stood out because they were the most organized and kindest, the whole feeling continued and made a difference. And the minister wondered if the search committee is representative of the congregation. And the answer is yes, they did represent the congregation well.
- n. Once upon a time, this church went through several RE directors and we did not know what was going to happen. And we ended up with an amazing person for 3 years who helps us understand what is really possible.
- o. Once upon a time, the Youth group wanted to host a conference and we didn't have enough space. So they held the Con at the 4H camp at Allerton, and the whole congregation supported them bringing food and helping the youth host the conference.
- p. Once up a time, a newly divorced church member who had been through some traumatic times fell ill again with breast cancer and a group from the congregation helped organize a Share the Care support group that provided 24 hour care through the end of her life.
- q. Once upon a time, at a church coffee house, a newer member performed for the first time and felt accepted.
- r. Once upon a time, a church used the democratic process to discuss posting a Black Lives Matter banner on the outside of the church and celebrated putting our concerns for injustices against African-Americans publicly on our building.
- s. Once upon a time, a church held a meaningful memorial service for a member who had not been able to attend for a long time due to illness and did an extraordinary job of working together to honor the member.

- t. Discussion of how our building and grounds are an extension of our culture – Historical plaque; wayside pulpit quotes; rainbow flags; Black Lives Matter banner
26. Synopsis: Lisa's observations on some of things that she heard in our stories:
- 0. Stories of a congregation that tried some things that didn't work and they tried different things again instead of being stopped. We continue to try new things again. We are not being held captive by the past.
 - 1. We care for each other and the definition of who each other is keeps growing to include other people.
 - 2. We take important stances to address unpopular but important issues and this helps to identify who we are and to stand on the side of justice.
 - 3. All about people and empowering people within and without the church. Our social justice work is about empowering those who do not have power.
 - 4. We use good process and intention to do things new and different.
 - 5. We are finding new ways to be with each other even in the tough times.
 - 6. Now switching to the future. Crack open. What might you be in the future?
27. Glenn Ridout story - of course, black lives matter. The question is whether or not you matter to Black Lives?
28. Who would notice if you would gone? Why do you bother exist? Who do you want to notice if you were gone? (See Newsprint for discussion)
- a. Who would notice/miss UUCUC if we were gone? (from Newsprint)
 - 1. OWL recipients
 - 2. Three Spinners – immigration asylum group
 - 3. Mennonites, Quakers, B'nai Brith
 - 4. LGBTQ and UP Center
 - 5. Marchers & Protesters
 - 6. Safe space/brave space seekers
 - 7. Channing Murray
 - 8. Faith in Place
 - 9. CROP walk
 - 10. Daily Bread Soup Kitchen
 - 11. Shared offering recipients
 - 12. Bereaved families
 - 13. Groups using our space (often at reduced rates)
 - 14. UUA and Midwest RegionUUA
 - 15. Those wanting a liberal religious present in community even if don't come themselves for a variety of reasons
 - 16. NAACP
 - 17. Planned Parenthood
 - 18. Democratic Party
 - 19. School Board
 - 20. Teachers Union
 - 21. Interfaith Allilance
 - 22. Each Other
 - 23. Partner Churches
 - 24. Those who struggle to find a religious community
 - 25. Those doing good work who get renewed here
 - 26. I would, and members and friends
 - 27. Those inspired to more social justice by us
 - 28. Families seeking RE
 - 29. First Followers

- 30. Death with Dignity
 - 31. Music lovers
 - 32. Bail Out Coalition
 - 33. Build Programs/Not Jails
 - 34. AWARE
 - 35. Senior grant recipients (of annual Victor Hoersch Trust grants)
 - 36. "waived rental groups"
 - 37. ACLU
- b. Who would we want to notice/ miss us if we were gone? (from Newsprint)
- 1. Immigrant community, including undocumented, alone or not
 - 2. Own children as they grow
 - 3. Seekers of justice and fairness
 - 4. Disenfranchised/vulnerable
 - 5. Ideas about who is in and who is "outside" would dissolve – we would change to allow all that to happen
 - 6. U of I campus, other higher ed
 - 7. Seekers of spiritual growth and comfort
29. What does this tell you about yourselves?
- a. We are a whole community. We want to continue mattering to each other- to reinforce and foster that sense of whole community as we grow
 - b. We are committed to making the world a better place
 - c. Our members do a lot without recognition of the church
 - d. We are easily mobilized (not bullied into action). We want to
 - e. We are generous with time and money. Some of the things we named who would miss us is because we support them in resource and money.
 - f. The things we want will take personal growth as well as community growth. It stretches us a bit.
 - g. We are doing so many things, we needed a room full to get this large list.
 - h. If we want to impact further, do we need to let some things go? Can we do all of this and more?
 - i. This is a perfect opportunity to share the work with anyone willing to join us in these efforts and they do not have to pay to play.
 - j. Is there a way to encourage others into leadership and for us to move into followership as a way of growing what we offer? Is our job to lead (often our current intention/view of ourselves) or our job to be present and follow? This is a part of our white supremacist understanding and our journey to change. How do we foster a spiritual practice to become followers and supporters and not necessarily leaders?

Lisa's charge here – take this list and pare it down to what matters uniquely to the UU congregation; not just to individual volunteers who would do that work anyway?

31. Story about student asking Rabbi Hillel what is the most important part of the Torah – Rabbi said: "that which is despicable to you, do not do to others. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it." Lisa's charge: It is more important to know what your mission is than to write your best mission statement. What holds you up and why are you here? The list from #29 - that is our bedrock. It is a lot more fluid than one mission statement. How does this differentiate you from any other religious/organization in town – unique vs. axiomatic purpose.

32. We have a mission statement. **Build community. Seek inspiration. Promote Justice. Find Peace.** Now we need to work on the commentary.

- b. What do we mean about community? What are our limitations? Boundaries? How do we describe or imagine community? Part of what we need to do is look at the antithesis. Build community.. what does destructive/de-constructing community look like and how do we respond to this? We have a Covenantal relationship – What is the destructive we cannot allow? Who is welcome/who is not?
 - c. Our mission statement is good. We need commentary and further definition.
 - d. Seek inspiration. What are the limits on this? We cannot just believe anything and be a UU but what do we believe? What are the boundaries?
 - e. Promote Justice - with whom? For whom? Who gets to say what justice is? Who is a part of this conversation to define? How do we want to be justice people inside this community and in the outside community? The big one: who is at the table for this conversation and defining process?
 - f. Find peace: what does this mean? What is the commentary on finding peace? One of the things about covenant is that it will always be broken. What is the mechanism to come back to the community when the covenant has been broken?
 - g. How do we have these discussions: this is a great mission statement and what do we mean by it? Where is our 'no?' If we cannot say no, we cannot say an authentic yes. The no does not have to be a hard and fast, no - it maybe we need to wait awhile.
 - h. We are at our best when we face our disappointment and decide to stay anyway. Our community is a reality - not a fairy tale.
33. Mission statement: keep the words the same and learn how to live it new. Create new commentary with our Dream Team and the Strategic Plan. Part of the genius and chore is figuring out what the commentary is? What is the axiomatic? How do we live this out today? How do we live it out tomorrow? What mechanism do we use to revisit it? What vistas do we need to stand upon to observe well?

Time for Questions and Comments:

- 34. Question: Emily Laugesen: In getting to the specific of 'what is this for us' what do you recommend? Are there other methodologies than just sitting around the table and talking. Lisa: Use your imagination - how else might you think? Who do we need to be in partnership with in our community? Where do we hear ourselves being called? Being in silence together- praying
- 35. First and foremost - how do we figure out how to use your experience today with the others who were not here today? How do we recreate this with others? How do we listen for answers than just providing them?
- 36. Randy Locke -- How do you learn what to say 'no' to?
- 37. Dave Sharpe If our commentary becomes our strategic plan, that would be a different kind of thing - inspirational vs. operational. We would work from discussion/commentary of the mission statement rather than generating a list of things we want to do. The operational would grow from the inspirational
- 38. Florence question to Lisa. How do we engage newer members; those who weren't here today.
 - a. Ideas to reach people in new ways: Lisa: a poll in church service to answer on your phone using an online poll....
 - b. Lisa – make a video with 2 to 3 questions and link to answer them
 - c. Skit/creativity – do something out of the box
 - d. Small focus groups – what would be appealing to you? What would you hope would or will happen?
 - e.

We end with a time of gratitude - Lisa Presley shared her gratitude for this congregation and a prayer.

Prayer for Living in Tension

By [Joseph M. Cherry](#)

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
we must be
bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be
so bold,
so brave,
and so loving.

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/payer-living-tension>