

Minister's Report to the Board - August 2018

I will miss this Thursday's board meeting as I will be gone from Thursday to Monday for a festival event on the coast of Oregon. It is a sacred music and arts festival, and from what I gather, it is put on with great intentionality and a strong grounding in ethics. I am curious to explore the ways that they are combining lived values and the creation of experiences. Hopefully it will offer some good food for thought for us here at UUFCO.

Summer schedule

I understand that Rev. Antonia left for a two-month block in the summer without communication avenues and that many in the congregation found this difficult. My thought for this first year was to only take two weeks away for family vacation (which we just returned from) and work shorter weeks during the summer so that the congregation would not experience as much ministerial absence. Rebecca and I were also excited to use the summer to deepen our roots and relationships with our neighbors and the city of Bend.

I do think it is good for both the minister and the congregation to have space of disconnection during the summer months. It is healthy for the congregational system to remind itself each year that it can get along just fine without the minister around for a while. One learning from this first half of the summer was that if I worked fewer days in a week, the work did not slow and just shifted to longer hours on the days I worked. Granted, there are a lot of moving parts this summer with going to two services, Men's Group expansion, growth conversations, RE revamp, Pastoral Care Team creation, budgeting, and onboarding of new staff. For next summer, I believe if I start with a week off of study leave, it will break the pattern of my being here and make working an adapted schedule more possible. We'll see...

Growth

The Growth Team continues to do good work in our planning to go to 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services with Community Hour in between. The Worship Team met and went through the changes that need to be considered in the switch. One piece that has been a challenge a positive solution for the displacement of the meditation group. With their input, we have decided to have meditation begin at 9:15 and run during the first service. We will revisit this as we evaluate mid-year.

Pastoral Care Team

I held a daylong training for our newly established Pastoral Care Team. It was a success, and I am really excited to begin working with this team. They are all invested in learning about pastoral care and offering it into our community. The worship service on August 25 will introduce the team to the congregation and educate folks on their mission. The team is:

Ellen Atkin
Bob Barber
Joyce Brown
Susie Hickman
Wendy Howard
Jameson O'Neal

Staff Time, Concerns, and Going Forward

Marty let me know that the board had a brief conversation about staff time at the last meeting. I wanted to share some thoughts and offer some clarity of where we are with our staff. I can say that Jenn, Chela, and Parker all work extremely hard, are aware of their hours, and are dedicated employees exhibiting good stewardship of their time. I have no concerns with them and am, in fact, incredibly impressed with the work ethic and talent they bring to our congregation.

I began working more directly with Ayla in February of this year. I have mentioned challenges to the board but have not reported on it formally. The first half of the year was spent learning about and from the staff and watching their work and programs in action. After spending some Sundays off in the RE space and witnessing myself and by listening to feedback I was hearing from parents and the Children and Youth RE Team, it became clear that our religious education program for children and youth was insufficient and struggling. What was also clear was that our retention of new families was low. This began a series of conversations with Ayla around restructuring the program, a need for greater professionalism, attention to safety concerns, a closer supervision of her work, and a focus on time management. Ayla has been receptive to these conversations and open to more direct supervision. I now meet with her about every two weeks to look at projects and time use. There has not been a clear shift in her performance, and it is possible I will begin weekly meetings with her. Ayla is great at idea creation, and she is passionate about the children and the programming. She has the growing edges of communication, time management, and project implementation.

With board approval, I used money from our consulting budget to hire Rev. Christina Leone Tracey to facilitate visioning and structuring work with our congregation and the RE Team. Rev. Leone Tracey brings a wealth of experience and the weekend was extremely productive. I also contracted with her for ten ongoing consultations with Ayla over the next year. It has become clear to me that Ayla has not received adequate training or support in her role from previous ministers. The job responsibilities have also shifted as the congregation has grown. My hope is that with Rev. Leone Tracey's guidance and close supervision from me, Ayla will gain the skills, confidence, and professionalism that UUFCAO needs to create and support a thriving program to serve our children and youth. Ayla will also be beginning Renaissance Modules in the coming year, which are educational opportunities provided by the Liberal Religious Educators Association. I will keep the board informed on this staffing concern.

In general, with the staff I have tried to create an atmosphere in our office that is efficient while being relaxed. Our weekly staff meeting provides space to check in on our work loads and stress levels which wax and wane with different times of the church year. Years ago, I adopted a practice of never responding to the congregant question of "How are you?" with "I am busy." despite how true that might be. This has the potential to convey the message to congregants that there is not time for them. I have encouraged the staff to also think in this way when we interact with congregants so that they experience our staff as available and open. When congregants come into the office, we try to say hello. I have ongoing conversations with all our staff around workloads, job descriptions, and boundaries so that they do not become overburdened. My goal is to manage the staff in a way that the work is reasonable and fulfilling, the office environment is supportive and fun, and that we are committed to serving the mission of the congregation.

Gratefully,

Scott