

**Report of the Futures Task Force**  
**University Congregational United Church of Christ**  
**October 15, 2019**

**Task Force Steering Committee:** Priscilla Kloess, Mary Kollar, Kathy Kripps, Becca McMullen, Catherine Foote (leadership staff liaison)

**Task Force Co-chairs:** Kathy Kripps and Priscilla Kloess

**Task Force Members:** Carol Bryant, Tim Croll, Joan Davis, Mary Sue Galvin, Tim Johnson, Bart Klingler, Emily Morishima, Ellen Naden, Mary Jean Phipps, Margaret Stine, Denis Streeter

### **Summary**

In 2018, Peter Ilgenfritz, pastor at UCUC for 25 years, made the decision to step away. His last day with the congregation was Dec 31, 2018. On January 1, 2019, Todd Smiedendorf was welcomed as our Bridge Pastor.

The decision was made not to hire a traditional "interim pastor". The Leadership staff would provide support for a Future's Task Force to examine our focus, how God is calling us, and what staff we need to help lead the congregation in the years ahead.

At the February 14, 2019 Council meeting the charge was given to create an Interim Task Force to:

- Look at where our church has been
- Listen for how God is calling us to proceed into our future
- Examine program priorities, our church's mission, worship and parish care needs
- Identify goals and direction.
- Recommend the leadership staff we will need to achieve these goals.

\$10,000 was allocated for the work and would be appropriated from the New Initiatives Fund.

### **Process**

The Future's Task Force (FTF) began its work in April 2019. The group of 16 were divided into five subgroups: Listening, Research, Staffing, Attendance/Membership, and Reflections/Consultant. Each subgroup had a chair, staff leadership liaison and a set of questions they would center their work on. The subgroups each met regularly as needed for their work. The Listening group met weekly. The entire task force met approximately every two weeks and more often toward the end of the process.

The Reflections/Consultant subgroup quickly identified Don Hill from Cleveland, Ohio as the best candidate for the job. The purpose of the consultant was to help us see our

blind spots, offer ongoing reflections, note areas of confluence and/or contradiction, and areas of affirmation and challenge.

Once the work of the Reflections/Consultant subgroup was completed with the hiring of Don Hill, the members of that group, Mary Kollar and Becca McMullen combined with co-chairs Kathy Kripps and Pris Kloess to become the Future's Steering Committee. Catherine Foote was the Leadership Staff Liaison for that group.

### **Identity Statement**

Early in the work of the task force the Internal Identity Statement that was written as part of the discernment work in 2007 was reviewed. Although some of that document was still current, it needed significant updating to reflect the values and beliefs of UCUC in 2019 and how those values are reflected in worship, Christian education and the work of love and justice. Please see Appendix 1 for more detailed information.

### **Vision Statement**

Upon reflection on all that has been learned through the Futures Committee we suggest the following vision to guide our work together.

#### **Brief vision statement**

*"Living the transformative adventure of God's love and justice"*

#### **Expanded vision statement**

We are a joyfully Christian church practicing the inclusive and transformational love of Jesus and working for justice in the world. As an open and affirming community, we offer authentic welcome for all, as we seek to build community and deepen our connections to God. We collaboratively nurture the voice and leadership of all generations in worship, community vision, and justice action.

**Goal:** We anticipate that this vision will be reflected in the vision of each ministry as well as in specific goals for our work together in the next decade. Specific, measurable objectives are to be developed and achieved in the next two years.

**Example:** "Deepen our connection to God", leads to a goal of "more access to a variety of worship experiences" over the next decade which leads to the objective of "in the next year we will offer an on-line weekly worship experience."

### **Subgroups**

The work of the Research (Appendix 2) and Membership (Appendix 3) subgroups provided for rich reflections on where we have been and where we are now. The Listening Group (Appendix 4, 5 and 6) provided avenues for the congregation to vocalize their hopes and dreams for the future.

## **Key takeaways from this group that our congregation should consider:**

### **Research Subgroup**

- Churches need a clear and compelling mission.
- Multiple entry points for inclusion and participation
- Spiritual growth and social justice are hugely sought.
- The positive experience of community and the felt experience of God/the Divine/Love will be a sign of authentic faith.

### **Membership/Attendance**

- New members have dropped by 50 percent in last five years
- Pledging units - annual average reduction of 1.5percent per year
- Worship attendance – annual average reduction of 2.2 percent per year
- These numbers are similar to many churches in the country – can a plan be developed to reverse this trend at UCUC?

### **Listening Group**

- Worship-desire for strong music and skilled preaching.
- Christian Education and Spiritual Growth—desire for more opportunities
- Stronger voice outside our building – as a community and through collaboration
- Balance between social justice and internal spiritual life
- Want to be filled and challenged
- Small groups, small groups, small groups
- Many priorities—Listening group did not identify a clear set of priorities or goals.
- Desire for visionary leadership to work with congregation to set priorities and goals.

### **Leadership Model**

The Task Force was charged with recommending the leadership staff that we need to achieve the goals identified. In researching this, the task force discovered the team leadership model as it exists currently has not been functioning optimally for some time. Consultants had been hired but many of the problems have not been resolved. At this time another consultant is working with the team.

This information was shared with the task force three months into the process. At that point it became clear that the leadership model needed to be evaluated.

In August 2019, David Anderson announced his retirement effective February 2, 2020. This became another factor that needed to be considered when looking at the leadership model.

An open and complete evaluation of the current staffing was challenging due to the difficulty in separating structural issues from personnel issues which are complicated by issues of race, gender, and tenure and also the need for confidentiality. Further, the congregation experiences the leadership team on two levels: Sunday worship with three Futures Task Force Report, page 3

equal voices versus a more detailed experience when collaborating with the team on the work of the church. With this in mind, we decided that a small group would be a more effective tool to evaluate leadership structures than a survey question.

In August, Don Hill, suggested we ask 10-12 select individuals who represent important segments of the congregation to participate in a focus group to go deeply into the issues around staffing in a confidential setting. The results of those conversations would be used in the development of a draft leadership model.

Through listening and conversations with the congregation, the task force identified areas of concern about leadership. These included a desire for leadership to help the congregation clarify our vision, and to translate the vision into goals and actions, a need for accountability, and a structure that allows us to move efficiently when needed (more directive leadership).

The task force also identified that the church highly values the presence of three equal voices in worship and a collaborative leadership model.

We are looking for a leadership staff model of vision, faithfulness, authority and accountability that:

1. Is tied to the evolving vision, goals and outcomes that the congregation discerns.
2. Has the authority and responsibility to evaluate the alignment of clergy skills and performance with the vision of the congregation.
3. Gives special care and attention to fostering diversity of voices within leadership, staff and the congregation.
4. Sets priorities and makes plans for faithful work, allowing us to move efficiently.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The present leadership structure including three pastors and a church administrator be reduced to three pastors
2. The search for a Business Manager begins immediately
3. The leadership model found in Appendix 7 be adopted.
4. The Minister for Vision and Stewardship be filled by an existing pastor (Catherine Foote, Amy Roon, or Todd Smiedendorf). Todd would need to be willing to extend his contract if he were to be considered.

## **Rationale**

In this time of change the congregation has been looking at ways to advance the concept of Team Ministry. With the model proposed (Appendix 7), the variety of voices in worship and leadership is preserved.

Additional attention has been given to more focused work on vision and growth. This is also true with issues of authority and accountability.

However, in working toward our sensed need for additional directive energy on the leadership team (named in part as authority and accountability), the flat leadership structure that has marked our model and has made us a groundbreaking congregation in church leadership is replaced with a more hierarchical structure.

This shift answers the concerns expressed by many regarding the wider vision and direction of the congregation, as well as authority and accountability within the team.

There are also concerns that need more time to be addressed.

The model includes a clause that "any two members can request a review toward a correction action plan for the other team member" to provide a way forward if the minister coordinating the evaluation is felt to not be acting in good faith.

The leadership model submitted includes clear assignment of responsibility. Further, the document specifies that the ministers will "honor the lead of the others in their areas of leading" and will "honor each other's areas of leadership".

The model that is recommended requires the Council and Personnel Committee to work closely with the Minister of Vision and Stewardship to test out this model for a two-year period.

## **Dissent**

Through the Futures process in the task force, steering committee, and focus group, there has been a consistent minority opinion for continuing with the Flat Team Structure.

Although acknowledging that the way has not been smooth, this minority holds that we aren't ready to give up on the Flat Team concept, and need to explore the possibilities for developing this model as Flat Team 2.0, rather than abandoning it too soon in favor of hierarchy. For many of us, Flat Team leadership is more than equal rotation in preaching, but an ideal of power sharing that is deeply counter-cultural and particular to the identity of UCUC.

## **Authority in Flat Team 2.0**

While it is tempting in troubled times to invest power and authority in one individual at the top of a hierarchy, we would remember that the authority in this church lies with the congregation through the Council. Ultimately it is the ever-evolving mission and vision of the congregation that must guide the actions of clergy and staff alike. The

congregation must be empowered as an active part of the vision. That is why it is important to plan and budget for clergy hours for shepherding the vision out of the congregation. In the Flat Team 2.0, all clergy hold shared responsibility shepherding the vision.

### **Collaborative vs. directive energy - silo structure**

Recent versions of the Flat Team have struggled with collaborative decision making. Flat Team 2.0 recognizes that more directive energy is needed in the leadership of UCUC. It may work well to reorganize work areas into silos where clergy take leadership of those programs, with other leaders on an inform and consult basis.

### **Provide for difference of opinion.**

Where work overlaps, Flat Team 2.0 must find a way to decide, focus, prioritize, and schedule. While cooperation is to be encouraged, where there are disagreements due to difference of opinion, the structure must provide a way for it to be resolved. Methods considered might be through a vote, by referring it to Council, or by having the Moderator break any ties.

### **What happens when it gets difficult? Prepare for conflict, and for growth**

To be successful as team, Flat Team 2.0 must shift in philosophy toward a growth mindset. Everyone should be wary of blind spots, the areas where we may be unaware we lack knowledge or skill. To support professional growth and uncover possible gaps, we should embrace a regular 360 review process, with anti-bias protections, for soliciting feedback from all staff, the conference, and other key stakeholders. When confronted with unexpected feedback, clergy must ask themselves "what have I missed that I'm not seeing?"

### **Continuous feedback from the congregation**

In addition, clergy should be provided with continuous feedback from the congregation, and help sorting through it. The LPRC could become the PPRC (Pastor Parish Relationship Committee) to support the health of individual clergy and of the whole team. The PPRC would meet regularly with clergy as individuals, to hear their concerns and work on discernment of the next growth opportunity. In addition, team health would be a specific budgeted expectation of each clergy member.

As we move into a new focus with our Racial Justice and Anti-Racism initiatives, the organization as a whole will need to grow its compassion, trust, and the muscle required for courageous conversations. Flat Team 2.0 could become a powerful model for shared power in amore just future.

Respectfully submitted, Becca McMullen

## **Next steps**

The council's charge to the task force included "examine program priorities, our church's mission, worship and parish care needs" and "identify goals and directions". Our assessment is that this step requires a longer process and should be facilitated by the leadership staff working with lay leadership and the church community. As the listening report states: the sheer volume and breadth of our dreams for our community will necessitate setting priorities.

The Minister of Vision and Stewardship should be decided on by January 2, 2020 with responsibilities commencing on February 3, 2020. The church moderator, assistant moderator, and personnel chair should meet with clergy staff to make this decision.

## **Other areas of work**

- The membership group identified the steady decrease in membership, pledging units and attendance. They recommended that a specific plan be developed to stabilize or reduce these trends.
- Shore up individual spiritual practice
- Grow muscle of welcoming across differences, especially in race
- Build links between congregational vision and leadership
- Corral and focus justice projects.

Respectfully submitted:

Kathy Kripps and Pris Kloess

Task Force Co-chairs