

1/13/23 Board of Trustee Special Meeting with UUA Regional Representative, Wren Bellavance-Grace, from Northampton, serving UUA since 2011

In Attendance: Greg Heyl, Danielle Jeanloz, Tracy Johnson, Ed Mangiafico, Jon Nye, Naomi Turner, Liz Van Wye, and Joe Zahka, plus guests – Sue Bauer, and Wren Bellavance-Grace

4:04 pm start time - Tracy reading – opening words

Introduction of attendees

Ed – What do other UU boards do and what works?

Wren – How has the congregation responded to your recent update and what questions do you have for the meeting?

Joe – People gave specific ideas of what could be done. Some talked about paying off the mortgage. This could be done with a Capital Campaign.

Wren:

Congregations come together (especially if they are geographically close) as in the case, recently, with Beverly and Salem. Salem has transferred their building to a non-profit, managed by a board that includes some members of that congregation, which then rents the building to other organizations. The congregation itself has currently moved to Beverly.

Other examples of UU mergers include Mendon/Uxbridge and Northampton/Florence which were done over time. Mergers involves trust and alignment of mission.

Covid has created numerous mergers. Some churches have simply closed, and some others have adopted a hospice model where they just try to keep the doors open as long as possible.

Conversely, some congregations have split apart (no examples were discussed).

Staff sharing is also an option to control costs including having one administrator (share info, groups, events, newsletter.) Sharing a minister is more complicated, because of the potential for differing loyalties and increased burdens of pastoral care. That said, she saw a likely increase in shared worship services in the coming years.

Ministry is changing since Covid especially, although it was already changing. Clergy are aging out nationwide and fewer new ministers coming in. More innovative ministry is happening like part time positions or lay ministry. Many congregations still need more pastoral care. Some hire a director of ministries to line up speakers for Sunday morning traditional services and then have a pastoral care team.

Clustered ministry is also an option where multiple UU congregations come together – Taunton/Brockton/Stoughton/East Bridgewater.

Faithful risks need to be considered - How comfortable are Board of Trustees and the Congregation willing to take risks and make tough decisions?

Commented [JN1]: Faithful?

Joe – asked what “yoked” ministries were. Wren explained that it was a main line Christian concept where there is a shared minister among congregations.

Ed expressed concern about the economics of ministers on Cape Cod,. Wren said it can cut both ways; on the one hand it is very expensive, but on the other, if housing costs can be shared or if a candidate already has housing, it can be a very attractive destination. Naomi wondered if our ministry calendar could be structured to allow someone to work ¾ time and rent out their residence in their off months as a way to pay for housing. Wren recommended contacting Jan Gartner at UUA who handles staff finances and has experience in figuring out a realistic pay scale for smaller congregations.

Liz – Asked about the search process and timeline. With less than full time ministry what do we need to do?

Wren:

You can have an interim search, a developmental ministry – congregation going through a process of change – often a 5–7-year process, or a contract ministry. More information and support is available through the Transitions Office at UUA.

The contract minister process is usually for 2-3 years. The minister could then go into a call (permanent role if all agree).

UUA has a list of ministers through the Transitions Office in a database of ministers looking and retired ministers. This list is also available on the UUA website.

Ed asked about how Stewardship is handled in other congregations?

Wren:

Stewardship is now considered more year-round instead of an annual drive. Pledge envelopes, for example, are offered weekly in some groups. Smaller amounts offered regularly with incremental donations are more common. Traditional auctions/fundraisers in person are way down. “Stewardship for Us” are professionals, a non-profit organization, that may have resources on their website and paid advisers who can help us. Brewster Parish UU may be using this group.

Simplify, create space for something new like local craft and art show.

Churches can grow organically in 3 ways: by biology (young families), retirees/others moving into the area, and evangelism. Personal invitation is the most reliable way to grow a congregation. Friends bringing friends. Building relationships. Churches can connect with potential members using what you offer (the thrift shop, art, music).

Danielle said it was one thing to get people to come to auctions, concerts, or the thrift shop, but how do we have them take the next step into becoming members?

Wren said that was the critical problem, but that we should continue to use personal invitation and so far as events are concerned, do what we do best. What brings us joy? Do what you love and let people know about it.

Ed – Simplify, what do we do best – center around that.

Tracy – We can and should simplify. We can start by reducing committees and numbers on committees. It's good to know that we're not so unusual, as a congregation, from other small congregations, and we have time and options.

Liz – It would be helpful to get more of the UUA perspective on a regular basis through emails, for example. We would like to get more information on what is going on with other churches, monthly newsletters, workshops.

Wren – We have this and will provide you with links and information on how to get more information from UUA.

The meeting ended at 5:15 pm.

Contact information provided by Jon added after meeting:

The main NE Region UUA website is:

<https://www.uua.org/new-england>

Here's a link to sign up for the NE Region UUA newsletters:

https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=0019nHHvdGXir4_4Adiz6fDsKRQk9HvixDSNOgi6-X36CCZ265_JkRkuOaUPxJEPWgWNLnaG_b8CW1FBaeQuOn2V7vMke4bvkpPe5XeRiJtiR7kHdnGnltrbHbzjnuMGG-nscM6NtTE1fmZdA95cd33WLnXXnSGgtQaSEdqESEguJCPLrranm1uUOlz_KGHB-ya

Wren's contact information is:

Wren Bellavance-Grace,
Congregational Consultant
wbellavancegrace@uua.org
(617) 948-4258