

Notes on the Start-Up Workshop

Last Friday and Saturday, Rev. Phil Lund (Congregational Life Consultant for the MidAmerica Region of the UUA) came down to Mankato to help us get off on the right foot with our new minister. Friday evening was a congregational potluck, with a discussion of our hopes and visions for the UUFM. We raised themes like becoming more visible in the community, attracting and sustaining the involvement of more young families, and having a consistently strong spiritual message not only from the pulpit but in all our communications.

Saturday was a day-long session with the Board and Rev. Rita. We started out exploring our hopes—and our fears. The Board shared the congregation’s hopes—spiritual growth, strong community visibility, especially to families with children. And, appropriately, the Board was concerned to provide the support to nourish our hopes—finances, of course, but also stoking the energy to realize our hopes while not dumping it all on Rita. Rita shared her hopes, too—that we be a team working together to support each other and jointly pursue our common goals—and warned us that “there is no heavier burden than a great potential” (to quote Linus). In his summary of this part of the day, Phil noticed that we talked a lot about visibility in the community, and our mission statement does say we want to nurture the earth and build community, but it is not very specific about our outward focus. For example, “justice” does not appear in our mission statement. He also stressed the importance of building a *shared* understanding of what it means to be a member—what do we expect of ourselves and each other.

We also spent a chunk of time retelling to Rita and Phil the stories of our history with ministry, starting in the 90’s with Lee Green, then Mary Kapper, Sara Oehlberg, Lisa Friedman, Lori Bushbaum, and Don Cameron—with a few gaps in ministry along the way. Almost all of them were part-time (Don, as interim, was our first full-time minister), some *very* part-time (Lee was an intern with us while she was still in divinity school). We took something from each of them, each shaped us along the path that finally led to our first, full-time called minister.

We turned then to exploring the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Minister. We built on Dan Hotchkiss’ *Governance and Ministry*, which proposes a (loose) distinction between the ministries of a church and the governance. Ministries are the actions in which a congregation engages to live out its mission. Governance is arranging the resources of the congregation to support the mission, and leading the congregation in discerning its mission. So, Rita supervises the staff and leads the teams working on Worship, Child Faith Development, and Connections. The Board develops the Mission/Vision, sets policies and assesses their performance, and works with the committees on Finance, Building & Grounds, and Personnel. And some things are held jointly between the Board and Minister: Communications, Shared Ministry, and Education & Justice. We developed a schematic of this arrangement, on the Board agenda for approval in October, available at <http://xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

We then turned to the care and feeding of our new minister. Rita told us her particular passion is Worship planning. And this takes time—the UUA advises that ministers spend about 20 hours developing a single worship service. She is also committed to building working teams—with the Board, with the staff, with the committees & teams of the congregation. And the risk, for her, is fire-hoses shooting at her from all directions. She asked our help in setting priorities, and being patient as some things are held in abeyance in order to put first things first.

In conclusion, the Board and Rita set several tasks for ourselves. We intend to hold more conversations with the congregation—you can expect more table topic conversations (but we'll try to hold it to once a month or so). We will also be working on discerning the covenant between us and the Minister—"What I promise to you" and "What I need from you to make our relationship work." And we will be working on our communication, both among ourselves and to the Mankato community—and, over time, sharpen our common answer to the question, "What are we here for?"

Finally, we set a date (sort of) for Rita's official installation as our settled minister: A Sunday afternoon in late April. It will be a grand celebration, and the Mankato community and our UU brothers and sisters in the region will be invited.