

CONGREGATIONAL CONVERSATION ON MINISTRY
AUGUST 5, 2018

President Adam Slate welcomed 173 people to the conversation on ministry. He introduced Kathy McGowan, Southern Region UUA, Paula Cole Jones, ongoing consultant, and members of the Board of Trustees, Personnel Committee and Committee on Ministry who developed the agenda for this meeting.

Rev. Wikstrom gave a reading for the lighting of the chalice.

Kathy McGowan introduced a covenant for use today.

We come together to work honestly and kindly with one another for the common good.
We expect to find respect, humility, curiosity, and care in all that we do together.

Adam went through a timeline of significant points in our history that have led to the need for this conversation:

- 1990s First conversations about becoming a program-sized church and growth issues
- 2000s Began balancing budgets by deferring maintenance, cutting UUA contribution and staff compensation
- 2011 Congregation calls Rev. Erik Wikstrom as lead minister
- 2012 Staffing Task Force report
- 2012 Board of Trustees decides to install solar panels
- May 2015
 - First of small need-based budget deficits
 - Vote on bylaw changes re: lead minister
- 2015
 - First Pulse Survey
 - Racial justice re-organizing meeting
 - Engaged Kenn Hurto, UUA Southern Region
- 2016
 - October – Congregational statement of public witness in support of racial justice and Black Lives Matter
 - November – Presidential election
- 2017
 - January – Women’s March
 - March – UUA hiring controversy and subsequent denominational resignations
 - April – Appointment of three UUA co-presidents
 - June – Congregation approves intentional deficit budget to grow staff and invest in stewardship
 - July – KKK rally and counter-protest
 - August – White nationalist Unite the Right rally and counter-protests
 - August – Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr. preaches at TJMC
 - September – Mark Ewert’s Next Steps report

- 2018
 - February – Our Dir. Of Amin and Finance Christina Rivera receives anonymous racist note
 - February – Postponement of 75th Anniversary celebration
 - May – First visit by Paula Cole Jones
 - July – Formal letter from group of congregants seeking termination of Rev. Wikstrom’s ministry
 - August – One-year anniversary of Charlottesville white nationalist rally and counter-protests
 - September – Vote on revised budget for current year
 - September – Results of 2nd Pulse Survey

Adam pointed out the different means congregants have to process their concerns with all aspects of church. These established processes include:

1. The Personnel Committee, which has the role of making recommendations to the Board about staff hiring, evaluations, financial package, and job descriptions.
2. The COM, which has the important task of interpreting, supporting, and monitoring the ministries of the church.
3. The Board of Trustees: the Board President and the Senior Staff are considered equals
4. Each member of the congregation: members may come to monthly Board Meetings, may reach out to members of the COM and to members of the Board, AND are encouraged to make an effort to meet with people one on one to discuss problems or concerns they have.

With a large attendance anticipated, a process was designed to allow maximum participation. The three areas for input were announced with the request that people choose one area for their response and limit their comments to one minute. A roving mic was used. Approximately twenty minutes were reserved for each question.

- How have I experienced the ministries of TJMC?
- What questions need to be answered for us to move forward?
- Other outstanding questions?

1 - How have I experienced the ministries of TJMC?

- Rev. Wik is the right person to lead us in racial justice work.
- I support Rev. Wik – he’s responding to concerns.
- I’m biased in favor of Rev. Wik because of the personal support I have received from him.
- My experience followed a trajectory over the years from an initial welcome and joyful participation (time, talent and treasure) through changes in my personal life that affected my ability to participate. I didn’t get the support I needed and eventually felt unwelcome and unworthy.

- Thumbs up for Rev. Wik for lifting up racial justice. He is an excellent teacher in class offerings and provides good worship.
- I've been here two years – we're fortunate to have Rev. Wik.
- We have a minister of great moral and intellectual depth in a church of great activity with an undercurrent of negativity. The discussion of the racist note deteriorated into denial that racism exists within our walls.
- I'm tired of the drama. Part of the problems reflect generational differences. There are so many problems in addition to race, but we are focused on one topic.
- I've attended two churches that Eric served and felt lucky to find him here.
- Being a younger person I wouldn't have joined a church that doesn't include racial justice work that sometimes makes us uncomfortable.
- I've worked closely with Rev. Wik. He has displayed openness and equanimity during all this.
- I feel blessed to have Wik in our lives. Coming from religious traditions where the minister is always right, Wik's openness and honesty about the human condition has touched us deeply.
- Wik gives me a reason to stay. The staff is amazing: Wik's atypical appearance, Chris's strong feminism, Alex's kick-ass performance in all she does.
- Ministry isn't one person; we're all part of it. This situation should challenge us to figure out how to repair what's wrong.
- I have worked closely with staff on the board. In the shared ministry model, Wik gives away so much power to women and truly shares. He empowers women, which is a great gift.
- When I first came, this was a warm congregation that erred on the side of 'nice.' The current minister is helping to shift this.
- I have concerns about Wik's leadership. He only deals with the leaders and ignores the rest of us. He's not filling my needs; I feel ignored.
- The sermons are less dry in the last couple of years with Wik and Alex. They are more open and heart-centered.
- Wik is great one-on-one and in small groups.
- There is ageism messaging, starting from the pulpit, that my age group "doesn't get" racism.

2 - What questions need to be answered for us to move forward?

- We are struggling financially since Wik came. How can we pay staff with the current budget deficit? We need to find the money or reduce staff costs.
- Can we address the notion that some voices carry greater value or weight?
- Can we acknowledge that we need to address racism within our congregation as well as in the outside world?
- How do we deal with the fact that the larger financial supporters of the church are the ones who aren't happy?
- Why has attendance dropped by one third though membership has remained level? There is a change in commitment.

- When can we start observing the bylaws which require that the lead minister be in charge? The congregation voted down the triune model.
- We need to find out why people aren't coming. We need data. We can't lay all this on Wik without data.
- The formal means of registering dissatisfaction haven't worked in the past two years, so people have banded together. We need another mechanism.
- The marriage rights issue involved heated discussion and some people left the congregation, but it did not cause the turmoil we're experiencing now. Why do people feel compelled to meet in private?
- When are the Pulse Survey results coming out? They need to be digested before we vote on the budget.
- We have attendance, finance and communication problems. We're all introverts: how do we set up systems that work for introverts?
- I signed the letter. We'll be better off after this process. Why aren't we voting up or down on Wik today?
- Our staff get to have personal lives. They can make personal comments on their personal Facebook pages.
- Can we vote on the budget *after* the survey results come out?
- What is the process to evaluate the minister? Is there a written expectation?
- The messages of UU are a gift to the world. I'm sad we've diverted our leadership's energy to small complaints instead. How can we increase diversity and support our leadership to follow the UU priorities of love and kindness?

3. What other outstanding questions do you have?

- Are the dissatisfied people considering standards of leadership for the 21st century?
- Are we doing enough to support the women in this congregation? Losing Hillary's presidency and the violence of Trump have left women wounded.
- Can we see the reports that consultants gave? – Mark Ewert made his report to the Board with the recommendation that the Board make its own report to the congregation, which it has. There has been no report yet from our consultation with Paula Cole Jones, just the tally of comments she collected which is available in the office.
- Why are you a UU? I am because I believe in the ideals and the people here who make them real. My daughters feel the current divisiveness and won't attend.
- Are there statistics that show that attendance is down? – Yes.
- What has happened to pledge drives? We need to think about how we ask people for support.
- Why do people who have served TJMC so much stop coming?
- What is the procedure for the congregation to request that the budget vote be postponed until after the survey results are out? – The Board will take your feedback into consideration.
- We are talking about *everything but* what is best for our congregation to help us heal.

- How do we plan to support this church? – We have a ¼ time stewardship coordinator. While there is no single pledge period during the year, we will make year-round stewardship visits instead.
- A lot of the dissent is due to the lack of line item budgets coming at the same time as big deficits, leading to distrust. Will we have line item budgets for the next budget vote?
- What do we need to do to move toward reconciliation?
- “Fuck racist UUs.” – Did this happen?
- If funding and attendance are down across the nation, are we looking for answers in the right place?
- Does a person’s level of financial and volunteer support translate to power within the congregation?
- Our budget woes are not unique to Wik’s tenure.
- Stewardship should have a personal touch. I don’t want to pledge by computer.
- We are divided by age. There is a message that younger people need to run things and older people should sit back and pay attention. That issue hasn’t been addressed.
- We need to be sensitive to people’s economic standing before asking for money.
- We need name recognition for TJMC – T-shirts? What are other churches doing?
- 75% of our budget is salaries. 25% of our budget is Wik’s salary. What has the result of the stewardship position been? The divisiveness is the result of how Wik and Chris responded to the note.
- We all have different feelings around age and preferences in the church.
- When is the intergenerational committee being formed?
- How can further question come to the board? – Talk to any Board member. The email board@uucharlottesville.org goes to all Board members.
- Will there be a report on these questions and ways forward?
- Who do you want to fill this room? Who is missing? On aging, there is a lack of representation of younger people. I have ideas from other churches that represent young people well.
- Thanks for the productive comments and giving the time today. I support Rev. Wik.

The next steps in this process will include:

- Board debrief on today’s comments
- Present and discuss Pulse Survey results
- Make revised job descriptions available
- Ongoing feedback sessions
- Foster inclusive, multigenerational conversation and participation

Closing words to extinguish the chalice.