

First Church in Salem

Transition Team | Community Meeting Notes

Held Sunday 23 April 2023
Facilitated by: Wren

Question: (1a) What did our congregation do well to welcome Rev Ide and orient her to our traditions and ways of doing things?

Optimism

- Installation and small group meetings
- 99% vote for E
- Open and hopeful, receptive, excited for 1st female minister
- Delighted responses from search committee
- Excellent turn out/full church/hospitality
- Congregation happy for first female minister
- We were open to the possibility.
- Sense of optimism and enthusiasm
- Welcoming and upbeat

Ordination/Welcoming

- Ordination – lots of attend
- UUS SC connection
- Welcoming service
- Ordination service plus music/speaker
- Welcoming basket
- Her ordination was wonderful.
- Celebrations
- Dinner

Preparations

- New Office
- Office fixed up painting refinished desk made it into qa nice space
- Consulted Ide about what she wanted in office

Provided Support

- Formed a committee to provide feedback – committee on shared ministry.
- Different segment of ministry was invited to small group meetings
- People who gave her information about Salem and living in Salem

Question: (1b) In retrospect, what might we have done differently?

Increased Compassion

- Stand in her shoes
- We expected E to hit the ground running

Clarify Procedures and Expectations

- Change clear procedures
- Clear expectations and priorities--They're all different!
- ? expectations of leadership
- Was she given the opportunity to have defined expectations
- Have better defined /top down
- Tried to share unwritten customs but maybe didn't do well (weren't sure she was interested)
- Assumptions were made on what was important to us
- Could have clarified with E what our priorities were as far as traditions and customs
- Didn't take time to teach her who we were

Provide More Training

- Needed more training and listening from E
- More formal onboarding process

Improved Intra-Church Communication/Understanding

- Better communication between ministering, standing committee as to the roles
- Better understanding of how the church works
- Needed more communication from us
- Ability for community to give feedback
- Not sure there was much done or much discussion of what could be done
- Lots wasn't known in general
- Transition committee existed but people were not aware of it

Improve Vetting of Candidate

- Ask better questions or different questions during hiring
- Pick someone with more experience.
- Was the selection committee responsible?

Increased Collaboration/Connect/Support

- Ensure time with staff is meaningful.
- Meet with chairs
- Welcome Group post search
- Individuals spend a day with the minister
- Series of small dinners
 - Welcome meals and meet and greet with the staff meaningful?
- We may not have been sensitive to how she would have liked to be introduced into Salem community
- Opportunities to meet (but may have been limited to church leadership)
- As former fellowship chair, I would have initiated meeting with minister rather than wait to be asked
- Ministers onboarding should have been managed. There was a sense that we didn't know what we didn't know and what a first calling meant for her.
- More structure should have been provided
- Need HR system in place
- Ask for UUA assistance earlier when people started having concerns.
- Opportunities to meet with E and search committee

Increased Receptivity

- Be more receptive as a minister and her style.
- We could have organized more informal opportunities and small groups to get to know her

- Step into role of share mystery

Other

- Welcoming newcomers in general is a challenge.
- Setting up meetings with political officials
- Few clergy present.
- Needed to outreach more
- She did coffees to try to get to know people; but not many showed up
- Let the community know what the [xxxx] was about
- Offering transportation for those who needed it to gathering.
- E asked many question
- Overbearing/weird

Question: (2) In the first six months, what was going well in general? What was E doing well? What were we, the congregation doing well?

Enthusiasm

- Lots of enthusiasm
- Hopeful congregation
- Good feeling of things of excitement
- Upbeat feeling
- Symbolized new beginning.

Communal Activities

- Belling Ringing event – prepared
- Holiday celebration
- Caroling
- Enjoyed events such as Shallop's wedding
- Introduced *Soul Matters* – small group ministry was positive
- Continuity

Community Support

- UUA connections
- Congregation tried to offer support
- Congregation made a good faith effort

Reverend was Supportive

- She was supportive, helpful in terms of pastoral care; connecting people to help
- One-on-one chaplaincy work was her strength.
- Her involvement in RE
- Consistent and positive, optimistic attitude from minister
- Minister listened.
- Reve Ide was very good one-on-one
- Good at one-on-one
- Pastoral care -- relating to those in need
- E reached out personally

Positive Actions by Minister

- Sermons improved as time went on

- She believed strongly in shared ministry, but we didn't know how to do that well..she didn't seem prepared to coach us through that but was waiting for us to get there on our own
- E was working to learn our social justice outreach locally
- As a new minister, some saw weekly improvement.
- Appreciated the call to introspection rather than political action
- Pastoral Care
- Very present and in charge
- Pastoral care
- Foundation in place to get us to where we are going.

Question: (3) In the first six months, what conflicts or challenges appeared, if any. How did we handle them?

Religious Education

- Deb D left parents and congregation and Re director rallied
- Hiring new Re

Interpersonal Style

- Rev Elizabeth didn't lead the process of connecting with people
- E not so interested in listening or hearing what others tried to say
- No person connections with people
- People started finding her cold
- Was not a strong speaker
- Left people unheard
- Volunteers were not welcome or turned away
- E was shy, locked office, quite and introspective, private, did not reach out
- Felt let down that my confidence in minister's growth was shaken
- Socially awkward.

Sermons

- Some people displeased with her sermons
- Sermons uninspiring; people stopped coming
- Was non relatable/sermons

Communication Problems

- Lack of communication
- No response to emails and calls
- Needed to communicate via Intermediaries.
- People stepped back from communicating.
- Could not impart wisdom

Management

- Lack of ownership /contribution
- Seems like she started retreating when getting feedback
- Issues were presented to her by Anthony and ministerial relationship committee
- She got some coaching with speaking/enunciation
- Staff management issues
- Lack of management

Systemic Challenges

- Congregation wasn't aware of how much was being done to address things
- Unarticulated expectations came to the surface many of which were unnamed previously
- Continuity was based on previous ministers' styles, which may not have been sustainable
- We did not realize we needed someone outgoing
- Asked for help to work better as committees. Rev Ide suggested creating a covenant. . that didn't work well because we didn't have experiences working with covenants.
- Sense of unmet expectations or mismatch of expectations of E in pulpit or interpersonally
- In the face of this we either ignored them or voiced them in difficult ways – hurtful ways – or were frustrated through lack of understanding
- Lack of culture to discuss perceive issues without whining – in a way that looks to future.
- Set in our ways while perceiving ourselves as open
- E was built up; disappointed thrown into this
- People not aware of what a blow it was to lose Deb G – gone as a resource
- Hiring a Director of ER in a vacuum
- Do not have good mechanisms in place
- How we communicate or not as a church
- Much more communication to have a new minister or a newly ordained minister
- We didn't do the work we needed
- Expectation it wouldn't be hard

Negative Communication within Community

- Gossipy -- behind the scenes communication
- Some jarring discordant conversation began to take place that were shocking and concerning; raised fear

Question: (4) What did we learn about our minister and ourselves during those first six months?

Clarify Expectations

- Set realistic expectations for a new minister
- Need better expectations and communication.

Better Transition

- Didn't take much or enough time to mourn
- People weren't willing enough to participation in transition

Learned about Minister

- Learned that she was indecisive and that it was difficult to reach consensus on anything
- Vet "personality" (e.g., rule following, reflective listening, etc.)
- Really understand the circumstances that led minister to us
- That rev ide's style was direct but needed to establish a chain of communication when constructive feedback conversations need to be handled
- Wasn't relatable.

We Differ

- We all have different priorities and needs
- It appeared we all had a different relationship both positive and negative

Anticipate Needs of New Minister

- She was a new minister, and I don't think we gave her much slack for that. Apparently, we were more patient with Jeff when he was new. I didn't do much to help her develop that.
- Managed Deb's leaving in a more detailed or thoughtful way.
- How can we support?

Clarify Conceptions of Ministerial Leadership

- Assumptions on leadership
- What is leadership?
- More support in development "shared ministry"

Other

- Trust my instincts
- Consider a church ombudsperson
- Great interpersonal connection with minister important
- Lack of communication

1. What did the congregation do well during COVID?

- **Good use of masks and zoom**
 - Good use of masks and zoom
 - Protected safety of most vulnerable members
 - Anthony did a good job by setting the COVID policy
 - Good
- **Adapted quickly to video conferencing.**
 - Got online quickly and well
 - Pivoted to zoom quickly
 - Pivoted to zoom like the rest of the world fast
 - Effort to improve the experience.
 - Pivot to zoom
 - Technology, Zoom and Breakout rooms
 - Adapted to Zoom
 - Staff, Catherine learned quickly
- **Pastoral care committee stayed active**
 - Pastoral Care
 - Pastoral Care Committee
- **Alternative Services**
 - Online fellowship was nice
 - Outdoor services were nice
- **Outreach Projects**
 - Phone call and card project
 - Outreach phone calls
 - Phone calls were good.
- **Support from Within and Outside Church**
 - Lots of support from UUA/Made use of other congregations.

- Connecting with services with UUA
- Other voices did energize and strengthen the church
- Members helped and stepped up
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- **Care team in place**
 - Care team in place
 - Re-entry team was good
- Online donations
- Soul Matters and Soulful Home
- Breakout sessions on zoom instead of coffee
- Good attempts to maintain connections

2: What could it have done differently?

- **Could have done more activities outside**
 - Once vaccinated would could have met outside
 - Creativity – could have done more outside
 - Could have come back together in person sooner
 - Come back sooner from COVID
 - Come back sooner than we did
 - Less attendance at outdoor services
 - Too conservative (perhaps even irrational) approach to covid once we knew it was an airborne disease. Work toward trusting the science
 - Re-entry team could have been started earlier
- **Failure to Use Our Resources**
 - Look for “yes’ instead of “no” – how to do it
 - Lean into our strengths not our deficits
 - Give voice to our collective talents
 - Allow our yin and yang/team together
 - Creativity: we didn’t act on our ingenuity
- **Reach Out to Congregation and Beyond**
 - More outreach/connection
 - Minister didn’t reach out to a very ill congregation.
- **Need for More/Improved Communication/Communal Activity**
 - More opportunities for impromptu conversations
 - We could have done more by phone, especially for older congregation who didn’t have computers
 - Looked at the non-zoom communicated more to keep people connected (more phone calls)
 - Change breakout rooms
 - Adapting traditions and ritual life; chocolate Sunday → cookie drops
 - BLM rallies – could have organized as a congregation.
- **Other**
 - Bring something to the zoom service for communion

- Uncertain of Minister's Role in Pastoral Care
 - Poor choice with RE [interim? Interior?]
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3. What were the worst impacts of COVID in our congregation?

- **Did not lead church well during COVID**
 - Not enough direct meetings between minister and displeased members
 - Minister was resistant to meeting with members to resolve issues (not covid related)
 - Was not a strong leader and was introspective.
 - The wish to gather outside denied
 - Rigid rules
 - Kept church closed too long
 - We needed people to say "yes" to innovative ways to gather
 - Elizabeth hid behind COVID
- **Miscommunication; lack of communication**
 - Absence of opportunities for impromptu conversations
 - Triangulation of conversations
 - Lack of transparency
- **Disconnection**
 - Congregation isolated from each other
 - Some people felt isolated and unheard
 - Being away from one another
 - Inability to gather
 - Isolation does not bring out the best
 - Loss of self
 - Lack of trust in others
 - Sunday-tradition or practice of attendance church was lost
- **Lack of Connection from Minister**
 - Lack of engagement
 - Lack of warmth
- **Attention to Children's Needs**
 - Lack of RE for kids
 - Lack of Children Engagement
 - Teen lost connection to church
- **Fear and Anxiety and Negative Emotions**
 - Feelings of fear and insecurity
 - Fear exhibited by minister
 - There was a lot of negative responses to things we tried to do to adapt like the outside services
 - Frustration
- **Division**

- Cliques formed within the church
 - Division
 - **Other**
 - Pastoral care
 - No opportunities to express disappointment, loss and grief
 - Lack of choir singing
 - People were too discouraged to try (not necessarily covid related)
 - Financials impacted
 - Attention to committees and people [illegible] to church
 - Elizabeth's Sermons were lacking
 - Experiences
 - People took things into their own hands
 - Lack of willingness to work with her
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4. What did the minister do well during COVID?

- **Collective Events**
 - Soul Matters
 - Initiating card project and other quiet projects like Soul Matters
 - Soul matters was continued and handled well
 - Organized earth day with Deacons
- **Elizabeth prioritized needs of at risk**
 - Elizabeth prioritized needs of at risk
 - Keeping people safe and apart was a priority she did well at first
- **Pastoral Care**
 - Hospital visits
 - Pastoral care became more active
- **Good Use of Technology**
 - She got comfortable with technology pretty fast
 - Creating at reimagining ritual in a remote world
- **Help Empower Staff/Congregation**
 - Help people managing things and rightsizing plans to what was realistic and important. She could help us adapt to the new situation
 - Staff stepped up – Rev Eli maybe encouraged/empowered
- **Connected to Congregation/Individuals**
 - Made an effort to listen and support congregation's anxieties/Elizabeth was good at supporting anxieties.
 - Listened to help
 - Manage individual anxiety and fear
 - Was compassionate.

- Limited ability to connect
- When the outdoor service returned, she did well with that
- She showed up

5. What could the minister have done differently during COVID?

- **Covid Response**
 - Fearful of COVID
 - Have to come into the building
 - Some wished hybrid happened sooner
- **Organizational Issues**
 - Elizabeth could have done more guiding
 - Needed to allow volunteers to fix thing
 - We were on a leaking submarine
 - Silos
- **Spiritual Leadership**
 - Spiritual leadership missing
 - Homilies and not sermons
- **Interpersonal/Relational Difficulties**
 - Listen
 - More flexibility
 - Been more flexible
 - Pushed away; be open and welcoming
- **Other**
 - Problems with church same as country; some sermons didn't say that
 - Would have been better to have emails
 - Host services from church rather than living room
 - Misplaced concern about rights to music/"cancelled" music
 - Being the first female was a spotlight position
 - Zoom meetings after service were random
 - Ownership of Elizabeth transition with the Search Committee
 - What was the Search Committee's role with onboarding Elizabeth?

6. In what ways was the church a source of support for you during COVID?

- **Zoom was Helpful**
 - Zoom breakouts allowed us to meet each other
 - Zoom media did not capture her message
 - Liked service on zoom; accessible
 - So felt wonderful connection to this church on zoom compared to a previous experience
- **Communal Activities**

- Soul matters/Picnic at end of year help me get more connected to the church on many levels
- Soul matters was really helpful
- Origami cranes activity; care packages, easter bags
- **Was Not a Source of Support**
 - It wasn't
 - Not At All
- **Zoom turned a lot of people off**
 - Disappointed that there were so few people showing up on zoom
 - Zoom exacerbated the disappointment that was already there with Elizabeth
 - I didn't love zoom but I'm glad there was something
 - Helping adapt to online technology.
 - People left, not available, zoomed out. Not online -no tech
- **Other**
 - Card project/phone calls
 - Pastoral care
 - Sermons and break out groups
 - No stress Sunday mornings
 - Added technology

7: How do you feel COVID affected your relationship to the church?

- **Positive**
 - Returning to Church
 - Music was great
 - Got more involved
- **Negative**
 - Strained my feelings of confidence.
 - Apathetic.
 - Allowed drifting
 - Took me a while to reattach and come back consistently
 - Furious it took so long to come back in person
 - No care packages for college kids
 - Disconnected, unwelcome and anxious
 - The way the ministry ended
 - Felt confused with what we were experiencing
 - More consensus needed
 - making decisions as majority
- **Other**
 - Small gestures received from? Meaningful

Notes transcribed and respectfully submitted by
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