

First Church in Salem

Transition Team | Community Meeting Notes

Held on Wednesday May 24, 2023

Facilitated by: Transition Team

Question:

What did we as a congregation do that was troubling and caused concern and conflict?

Answers:

- Atmosphere of exclusion
- Unable to have 'face to face' meetings with minister on difficult issues (minister did not show up)
- HR was not informed; lack of communication between HR and Standing Committee
- Lot of blaming; committees and congregation
- Did not treat each other with respect; anger and exclusion
- UUA was too strict with COVID restrictions compared to other congregations
- Concerns about historical context of the experience this church had with their first woman minister; will there be issues in the future with 'first' ministers.
- Not publishing HEAL reports
- We as a congregation did not always behave; blaming and anger was hard to witness
- Divisiveness (social media and email) – folks didn't always feel safe to go to the source
- Lack of behaving honestly and directly and in covenant
- Donations seemed connected to happiness – reducing contributions because unhappy with minister or actions
- Many misunderstandings due to lack of clear communication or not sharing
- Not being open enough to hear others' perspectives – a roadblock
- Lack of organizational process to manage concerns – saddened for where that left Rev. Elizabeth
- Many things happened through back channels and in an echo chamber
- Seemed like there were only two sides – too hard to reach over to the other side
- Gossip and rumors
- Lack of patience – the process was being driven too quickly and without community understanding
- Felt that all perspectives were not welcome
- Venting to third parties – not direction communication
- Conflicts not handled well
- Building closed too long
- Factionalism
- Issues with understanding the role / duty / process of leadership versus the congregation as a whole
- Lack of transparency – meetings held behind closed doors
- Concern about the abrupt resignation of the RE director and unfortunate hiring of her replacement
- Not enough support for the minister and too much laser-like focus on the "problems" of the minister
- Didn't address turbulence as a faith community
- Taken aback by the February Special Meeting letter
- Angry that some members pushed their point of view at a pace that our church infrastructure could not handle

- Sideline conversations by small groups
- Concern about the push for an up and down vote
- We did not assume best intent
- We got caught up in process – too many UUs to change a lightbulb
- The issues and challenges were not clearly defined
- UU principles not adhered to
- Isolation is depressing, and can cause difference due to lack of communication
- Social norms held us back from sharing our genuine feelings

Notes transcribed and respectfully submitted by
Russell Lane