

Pulpit Editorial 9/24/23
Draft for discussion

What we did last year

The Transition Team was established by the Standing Committee in November of 2022. We were charged with helping the congregation to prepare for a search for a new settled minister.

When we began our work, the congregation was highly polarized, with deep differences in our understanding of the events of the last few years – in particular, the ministry of Rev. Ide and our congregational response to the COVID pandemic.

Assisted by Rev. Jenny and wren belleavance-grace of the UUA, we organized a series of congregational events – community conversations – in which members of the congregation could share their experience of the last few years. Our hope was that, through candid sharing and careful and respectful listening, we might come to better understand each other and reduce our sense of division and polarization.

What we heard from you all – what you all shared with us and with each other – revealed some real gaps in our ability to address and resolve the conflicts that are a normal part of congregational life. We also heard that there was a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the minister, the congregation, and the lay leadership of this community. One of our goals for the coming year is find ways to enable our community to come to a consensus about how we want to address these issues going forward.

There were strong differences of opinion about specific actions taken by members of this community – what was seen by some as “back channel” communications, the sharing of gossip and misinformation, a general lack of transparency and direct and candid communications. Another of our goals for the coming year is to find ways for our community to come to consensus about how we will relate to each other as members of a community of faith.

Last year was a challenging one for First Church, as we did our best to take an honest look back at what had been a very difficult period in our history. There was hard work to do, and you all stepped up and took it on. Our focus this year – the next goal in the UUA interim ministry model – will be about coming to an understanding of our identity as a community – who we are, why we are here, what we seek to accomplish as a community of faith. This should be a more positive and forward-looking focus, and we look forward to engaging with you all in what we hope and expect to be an exciting and constructive year.