

Where are we Now?
Rev. Tracy Sprowls
May 1, 2022

Tracy: Today is Beltane, the festival that celebrates the living world. It is a time of brightness and action, of creativity and awakening, of fertility and life. To celebrate Beltane one needs only to observe the awakening of the earth and the abundance of life unfolding. It requires intentional awareness of the possibilities and creativity all around us.

Today is also the last day of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr. For Muslims, Ramadan is a time of fasting and prayer, introspection and study. To celebrate Ramadan one must practice restraint not only in action but in thoughts. It requires a faithful intention.

The ending of one holiday and the beginning of another brings us to this moment of our transition ministry together. The time of introspection and study and listening and looking back with openness and awareness yes, perhaps even some restraint, opens up to a season of awakening- awakening to understanding that the past is done and need not determine the future, an awakening to the abundance of love and generosity that shapes and holds this community, and an awakening to the possibilities of a profound and significant future shaped by that love and generosity, and by creativity and faithful intention.

We have all done this work together; however, it is the transition team that has shepherded us through this transition or interim time, this space between one permanent ministry and the next. Let's have Laura Kemper introduce the team and say a few words about the work of the team.

Laura: I am Laura Kemper, member of TT along with C P, Jeffrey C, and Christina G I am deeply grateful for their contributions to the Team.

The Transition Team's has had 3 major tasks :
To welcome and acclimate Rev. Tracy in August, 2021. Thank you all for stepping up to meet her and for opening your hearts and your dinner tables to her!

Then provide a space for members to reflect on the last several years of their experience at the Fellowship, good and not so good.

This we did thru the Listening Circles where many of you shared your joys and concerns about life here in the immediate past.

Following that, we developed a Timeline banner on which folks could mark important dates in the history of the Fellowship and/or important dates in their lives here.

From these two activities, and with much help from Ron Smith's detailed histories of UUFCC, the congregation has intentionally looked to our past to see where we have come from.

In the Fall, we—and particularly a Search Committee—will begin the process of looking forward. What kind of a minister do we work best with? What is the focus, the mission of our community or is there more than one. How do we interact best with each other? Questions that we should all be thinking about in the coming months.

You have in your OOS, summary of LC comments. It was also in eNews this week.

There are copies of the readings from the Timeline summary on the table in the Foyer
Thanks again for taking part in this effort/As Pogo used to say, They is US!!

Tracy: Thank you Transition Team!

The Listening Circles and the timeline are part of a larger process in transition ministry. The interim minister is tasked with looking at broad categories of congregational function and then determining the scope of the work during the interim time. For instance, say the congregation doesn't have a music program, then one of the tasks of the interim might be to figure out why and then help the congregation create a path toward that goal.

We are going to go through those five broad categories of congregational function and connect them to the timeline now and then end with just a brief overview of what other work in these areas is being done or has been done with me, the leadership, and/or staff.

Laura: The first area is **Heritage**. Reviewing how the Congregation has been shaped and formed; encouraging and hearing all of the stories about the Congregation's past, as the foundation upon which the present rests; and embracing the rich variety that makes up the Congregation.

Looking at the Timeline created by UUFCC members and friends, it appears that the congregation has followed a steady and consistent path over the last 70 years, even with a few ups and downs. Working together to get a job done, looking out for those who are mistreated or overlooked, eating and playing together, and helping each other grow in important ways have always been the foundation of our life together. Even when we have had paid staff to support us, this community has always been built on and grown through the efforts of willing volunteers.

The timeline showed us

We felt the need for a group engaged in liberal religious thought and social justice activities which was the motivation for creating the UU Fellowship in 1950.

We were our own service leaders, ministers, and office staff for the first 20 years of our history.

We have worked well with some of our called and interim ministers, sometimes struggled with others. Ministers who moved on, often did so for their own personal reasons, sometimes because we wanted to follow our own lead.

We have always gathered in groups to eat and play together: extended family groups, TGIFs, Stone Valley retreats, Fellowship suppers.

We have made a concerted effort to raise kind and engaged children who can think for themselves.

We have created and shared art to decorate our walls, music to touch our souls, and poetry to express our feelings.

Cee: The second area is **Leadership:** Reviewing the membership needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership; providing opportunity for individuals and the Congregational organization to examine the types of leadership needed for new leaders to emerge, and for seasoned leaders to recommit or to refocus their gifts.

The timeline showed us

We have agreed to take positions on the Board and on committees.

We have faced difficult decisions together, as a community, sometimes overcoming internal disagreement, sometimes not.

We have created worship services for each other.

We have built and paid for 2 separate buildings of our own.

We have worked together to make governance changes over the years.

We have taught, often for many years, the children of our families.

Jeff: The third area is **Mission:** Defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction; clarifying the faith community's identity and core values; working to develop, update, and revitalize mission and vision statements; and reviewing strategic and tactical plans including stewardship and the financial health of the congregation.

the timeline showed us

We have tried, in so many different ways, to make our community and our world a better place for everyone:

We have supported a Vietnamese family, an Afghan family, a Central American family.

We sponsored the Park Forest Day Nursery and Christian Mission which became Interfaith Human Services.

Some of us helped create an ACLU office in State College, rallied for fair redistricting in PA, attended marches in Washington in support of Civil Rights, women's rights, Black lives, climate change, and science.

We have participated in silent and not so silent rallies at the Allen Street gates for many causes: against war, for marriage equality, for diversity and inclusion, and for equal justice for all.

Some of us have ridden our bikes to DC in support of clean energy, have achieved Green Sanctuary status for UUFCC, have researched a windmill on the property to generate our own power, and have planted a pollinator garden.

We have taken mission trips to Puerto Rico and Guatemala.

Laura: The fourth category is **Connections:** Discovering and revitalizing all the association, interfaith, and community relationships a congregation builds outside of itself; and re-assessing old links and considering new ones.

The timeline shows us

We intentionally greet each other and visitors warmly each Sunday.

We have helped each other through personal and global hard times.

We serve coffee and goodies to each other every Sunday while catching up on each other's lives.

We have cooked delicious meals together, often celebrating each other's holy days.

We have seen our babies dedicated, our children and ourselves wed, and, sadly, our loved ones memorialized.

We have participated in workdays to keep the building and the grounds tidy and appealing.

We have organized and taken part in many groups: the Women's Alliance, book groups the Diving Deep book group, Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, Small Group Ministries, racial justice discussion groups

We have sung in the choir, played in the jazz band, jammed together at the First Friday song circle.

We sponsor hugely popular Game Nights.

We see in each other's children hope for the future and pride in their varied and marvelous accomplishments.

Cee: The last category is **Future:** Developing congregational and pastoral profiles that position the congregation for its next ministry, including a healthy and honest assessment of the other focus points so that the congregation can turn its energy toward proactive decision-making for the future.

The timeline shows us- the future is up to all of us, working and loving together!

Tracy: Whew! That is a lot of information but hang in here with me because I do want to share with you a few final thoughts.

I want you to know this congregation is very healthy. You have clear policies and procedures, each group or committee knows their function, there is a strong sense of community, you are generous with your time, talent and treasure and most importantly your hearts. You made your budget this year when a large majority of congregations are not able to do so. Even though there have been some short ministries in your past you do not allow this to shape your attitudes and behavior and you will not allow that to shape your future. You have a covenant, mission and vision. You have excellent staff and vital and viable ministries.

There is work to do. Too many people have not yet returned to the congregation either in person or zoom. You care about this- I know- but you will need to be creative in welcoming people back and welcoming new people in. You need to let the community know you are here for all people as our communities become more polarized and groups of people become more marginalized. You need to use covenant and right relations as a means to heal broken relationships. And you need a ministry that speaks to the truth of

the human condition, a ministry of healing from trauma, grief, injustice, and brokenness.

Some of these things I am working on right now with various folks in this congregation-like lifting up covenant, renewing the right relations team, becoming transparent about how issues are resolved, updating the Safe Congregations Policy and creating a grievance grid so people know to whom and how to resolve difficult issues.

We should not underestimate the impact that covid has had on us as individuals and as a congregation. The Board is delaying for a few months the process of putting together a search committee for that reason. This will not impact the search process itself. But we need to acknowledge that people are exhausted and grieving and that is showing up in very different ways for us all and trying to put a search committee together now is setting yourselves up for deeper exhaustion and possible anger and hurt and alienation.

We will continue to plant seeds of possibility as we continue to work together, And we will keep our eyes toward the future as we continue to hold each other- in generosity of spirit, in creativity and possibility, in faithful intention, and love, always love.

Amen.