

In the Spirit

Rabbit, Rabbit and Happy (almost) October.

Thank you to those who attended the Community Conversations last weekend. I watched not just as your Parish Minister, but as a congregational consultant who has worked with many congregations on challenging issues of mission, vision, covenant and stewardship.

Some people may wonder, why is UUCGL paring down costs and why are the leaders seriously addressing and preparing for a budget deficit in 2027? Don't we have a huge endowment?

We do, and they are.

The reasons for this are sustainability and integrity. UUCGL has spent a tremendous amount of money in past decades maintaining a very expensive operation for a congregation that is dwindling in size. There is no shame in dwindling; it is a fact of life for mainstream denominations (that is, traditional churches that neither follow the evangelical model, nor are ethnic churches whose members share a national identity and are often highly populated by first-generation immigrants). But there are definitely important questions to be asked when a congregation's operating expenses are wildly disproportionate to the size of the congregation and the norms of the UUA. Of fifteen congregations random churches in our size category, the average operating expenses were \$184,000. UUCGL's has been around \$876,000 *not including the significant offerings we make to scholarships, grants and philanthropy.*

It's not just that this level and pace of spending will burn through the endowment, it is that the congregation, in being responsible about proportionate spending, may choose to eventually make decisions about their inheritance that will be much more exciting, meaningful and visionary than relying on it to pay for, for instance, a new boiler (did you know that we actually have a new boiler?).

I also truly believe that the board's proposals that will be presented in about five weeks will be part of a culture shift that potentially empowers and re-empowers its members to own more of the ministry themselves. I served a congregation for three years that had no endowment and no money in the bank. We reviewed every penny in the budget and did not own our own building. There was no office space for the first two years (I ran operations out of my apartment) and we worshiped in an elementary school cafeteria. That was a tight few years but what I learned is that in the absence of wealth, the people are highly invested and have mutually high expectations.

My respect to all of you for your commitment to stewardship and missional alignment for your budget and governance structure. It's hard and exciting work.

In faith, hope and love,

Rev. Vicki