

Summary from the Board's Listening Sessions for RE

In late June, the Board offered five listening sessions, via ZOOM and in person, to hear the concerns of UUCB members and friends about recent changes to our RE program. Twenty-one total UUCB members and friends took advantage of the opportunity to provide three Board members at each meeting with feedback and discussion. Here, with our thanks to participants, is a summary of what we learned:

With regard to children's RE: Some people expressed concerns about the future of the children's RE program over the summer and upcoming fall, and in the more distant future. They also voiced concern about how UUCB will support RE families in the future. Evident in their concerns was the lack of clear communication on existing plans from the Board.

With regard to the process of change: Participants seemed to agree that the suddenness of the changes in RE was a major factor in generating anxiety and concern. Many expressed uncertainties about the role of Rev. Clements (as an outsider) in promoting the changes in RE, evidently unaware of his responsibilities as interim consulting minister. Many said also they were uncertain of the relative roles of Rev. Macklin and the Board in making these changes.

Everyone seemed to agree that there was a lack of clear and timely communication. Without groundwork, the letter to the congregation announcing the changes caught many—probably everyone—by surprise. Discussion revealed that many people were unaware that the changes were based on the broader definition of RE as lifespan faith development, and that Adrienne's departure was not due to her performance with children's RE. Some people felt that changes in RE should not have been linked to personnel decisions, although notes do not make clear how this could have been accomplished.

With regard to personnel, a number of participants were not aware of the reasons for Adrienne's departure from her position. A significant minority of participants expressed their view that Adrienne had been treated too harshly, or even cruelly. Other participants, however, felt that her departure, being a personnel matter, should not have become an issue for the congregation. Some said they thought she had been treated fairly. A number of participants were not aware of reasons why Adrienne left her position, despite her good work with children's RE, or why this took place with such little warning.

As to the Congregational Meeting: Some criticism was directed toward the way the congregational meeting was conducted. A number of participants felt that the changes to the RE program should not have been discussed in that format. Others agreed that the motion regarding Adrienne's severance was inappropriate in that format and should not have been allowed to proceed.

Need for Lifespan Faith Development: Although some participants initially expressed skepticism about the need for lifespan faith development programming in RE, over the course of discussion most seemed to accept that more and better adult education would be a good thing for UUCB. Several were excited about the possibility of high-quality adult RE programming, giving as examples: "Owning Your Religious Past" and "Beloved Conversations"—adult RE programs that they appreciated in the past

Everyone seemed to agree that the congregation has been through a lot in the past couple of years and that this has caused some people to feel unmoored, like no one is looking out for them and their interests. Such feelings make changes like those in the RE programs feel more unsettling and riskier than they might feel in more normal times. And many participants commented on the need for improved communications across the board.

In the course of the discussions, participants made a number of suggestions for the Board and Ministers to consider over the coming months. These include:

- More and deeper involvement of the whole Congregation in re-envisioning and shaping the RE program. (NOTE: This is expected from the new RE interim)
- Better use of all communications formats – the Prologue, Facebook, Friday Update, emails, and other formats not yet adopted—to keep congregation informed as far in advance as is reasonably possible, especially regarding status and changes in the RE program.
- Earlier distribution of the congregational meeting agenda along with opportunities to discuss major issues in advance of the meeting.
- Clarification of the church governance model and the relative responsibilities of the Board, Ministers, Staff and Congregation; and the limits imposed on each by this model.
- Work with the Interim RE director to develop a 5-year vision and plan for the new RE program.
- Greater awareness of the need to explain labels new to the congregation, such as “lifespan faith development” and “Minister of Story and Ritual.”

These and more changes will be considered by the Board in light of events over the past two months. Controversy has revealed a number of gaps in policies and procedures related to personnel management, communications, decision-making, and the governance process. These gaps were not apparent until our system became stressed by disagreements related to the redevelopment of RE.

Over the coming months, the Board in consultation with the Ministers will begin making changes in policies and procedures to help restore stability to our church. We will make every effort to involve those directly affected by such changes in this process, and to keep all stakeholders informed of these changes.