

Interim Ministry Report
Interim Task 1
November/December 2019
Karen Gustafson - Interim Minister

The first of the Interim Tasks is “Claiming and honoring the past and engaging and honoring its griefs and conflicts.”

To this end, a part of each of the early conversations at the UCE Board Retreat, Elected Leaders Retreat, the Brown Bag meetings in September, several One-on One times and other small group meetings involved the question, “What question, if any, is unresolved for you regarding the departures of your past ministers?”

There were a range of unresolved issues. For those who had painful personal experiences with past ministers there were stories of hurt and mistrust and questions about what is appropriate to expect from someone holding ministerial authority. Others expressed concern for the particular vulnerabilities they had observed in the individuals who had served as UCE Ministers and what might be appropriate and inappropriate responses of a congregation and individual congregants to the impact of those vulnerabilities on the expectations of ministry. Still others expressed concern about the lack of reliable feedback loops to manage expectations of ministers and congregation. The question of “What is wrong with us that we keep losing ministers?”.

These conversations stirred up both useful information and some big feelings. This was a way of “honoring griefs and conflicts”. It was an important part of the story of UCE’s past. To the extent that unresolved personal hurts remain live, they need to be addressed in a pastoral or therapeutic setting. It is now time to let the bigger story emerge and lead into a new era of ministry. This new era may be one that holds a clearer understanding of the expectations of the relationship between minister and congregation and transparent structures that will support timely and appropriate feedback.

One of the transparent realities of the relationship between ministers and congregations is that that they end. Sometimes, believe it or not, they end well. That does not mean without sadness or a sense of some level of unfilled promise or unmet expectation but also with a true claiming of the best of each ministers love and service, honored in gratitude.

To that end, on November 15 in a sermon on “The Power of Story” I introduced the need to consider that larger story of past ministries that also included their lingering life giving legacies. On November 23, the names of past UCE ministers were read followed by a reading of some of their lingering positive legacy. Paper was provided in the sanctuary for members to add to that list of legacies.

Here is the combines result of that effort. (Our thanks to Margaret Shaklee for summarizing these comments.)

Charles Eddis 1966-1977

Charles Eddis took the congregation forward with a growing impulse to get out into the community and make a difference in racial justice through advocacy for fair housing in Evanston. We developed for ourselves an image as a “social justice” congregation.

In contrast to his predecessor, Rev Ross Allen Weston, who eventually betrayed the trust of the congregation, Rev Eddis modeled calm, collaborative leadership, approachability and trustworthiness. In contrast to Rev Weston again, Charles Eddis was thought to be “good at everything except giving sermons.”

Charles brought to UCE choir director Avon Gillespie, a black presence in our Sunday morning experience. Avon showcased his own black boys’ choir ensembles and brought some lively music experiences to the congregation! Avon Gillespie in the leadership of the church gave us a face of diversity at an important time in race relations.

Josiah Bartlett, Interim Senior Minister 1978-1979

Josiah Bartlett affirmed our place and value in the larger Unitarian Universalist movement. He called us to be a “cathedral church.”

David Sammons, 1979-1983

Dave Sammons continued efforts to get us out into the community for social justice, encouraging visibility with a billboard on our Ridge lawn declaring us a “Nuclear-weapon-free Zone. He led anti-war efforts in alliance with the North Suburban Peace Initiative.

Dave introduced the Serendipity Auction. He welcomed humor and an off-beat Sunday service experience. In contrast, he presented intellectually stimulating readings and sermons.

Dave Sammons brought us choirmaster John Giles, for which we are foreverafter grateful!

Carolyn Buss Minister of Religious Education (MRE) 1978-1985

Carolyn Buss was our first ordained RE person, having earned the newly-minted qualification as Minister of Religious Education during her tenure at UCE.

Carolyn Buss developed our first organized curriculum-based RE program and our first strong adult-ed program. Our program was bursting with children so that we needed more RE space – which we had to find outside the church building at Dewey School!

Carolyn developed our Boston Bound program, taking our young people to Boston to visit various sites in this birthplace of the American Unitarian experience. She also developed Ornament Sunday, a day of crafting ornaments for the church Christmas tree.

Carolyn and Dave Sammons designed “Children’s Focus,” a story time for children in the adult service, after which they went to their classes.

David Bumbaugh Interim Senior Minister 1983

David Bumbaugh brought his great experience in the ministry to guide us to heal after strife. He was a calm and thoughtful minister. He introduced readings from the Bible in the Sunday service of this decidedly humanist congregation. He also shared his poetry in the Sunday service experience – the first in an impressive legacy of poets in the pulpit.

Peter Samsom Interim Senior Minister 1984-5

Ann Tyndall interim MRE 1984-6

Ann had exemplary listening and problem-solving skills. She kept Carolyn’s great RE program going, kids kept coming & teachers felt valued. Said one congregant, “I took the train to Boston with the Boston-bound class when Ann was interim MRE – I’d follow her anywhere!”

When a later search committee proposed engaging Ann and her partner Barbara Pescan as our senior co-ministers, the congregation voted “yea!” based on our experience with Ann’s interim stay.

Our experience with Ann affirmed our resolve to continue with a Ministry of Religious Education.

Roger Fritts 1985-1993

Roger Fritts established the Caring Committee and developed a model for lay pastoral ministry (now Pastoral Associates). He undertook to make UCE a teaching congregation, with ongoing budgeting for interim ministers. He brought to Evanston interns Kirk Loadman-Copeland and our first experience of a female in the pulpit, Anne Marsh (“with whom we promptly fell in love!”).

Roger began Joys and Concerns in the Sunday service and established the tradition of having groups in the congregation sponsor lighting the chalice.

Roger led the efforts to add a wing to the church, which we did in 1991.

Abhi Janamanchi intern 1994-6

Abhi brought the wonderful traditions of his Indian culture to our community: the festivals of Diwali, Sankranti and Holi. Together with Frank Robertson, Abhi founded the Bharat Samaj, an East Indian gathering on the north shore meeting at UCE. Bharat Samaj and UCE shared their cultures for five years, a living experiment in building a diverse community.

Frank Robertson MRE 1986-1998

Frank Robertson was our first intentional engagement of a Minister of Religious Education. After arguing about whether we could accept Carolyn Buss as a minister when she earned her ordination and engaging the healing presences of MRE Ann Tyndall and interim senior minister David Bumbaugh, we decided to step up into the leadership of the denomination and continue to engage the new idea of MRE.

Frank was also our first gay minister at a time when that was still a bold step.

Frank supported the women’s groups and brought them into the congregation by using their worship ideas in the Sunday morning service.

Frank was a wonderful, joyful, kind spirit. He was our very own “Mr Rogers.”

Frank’s energy nourished the rummage sale into a mighty event engaging dozens of UCE’er’s in fellowship. He and his partner developed the annual Antique Sale with the same zeal and energy.

In the Religious Education program of the church, Frank started Intersession – the month of January when the whole church worked on a topic together – it was great to see the kids involved “upstairs.”

Ed Harris Interim Senior Minister 1993-1995

Ed Harris helped us talk about money: through his influence we ramped up the canvass (stewardship) effort and changed our financial culture. We began to step up to addressing the issue head-on of how we would finance our enterprise. Leadership-level pledges were celebrated. A roster of all pledges was published without names, giving us a graphic message that the church was financed wholly by us, the membership.

“Loved Ed – when I turned 50 and was a bit downcast, he said, “50 is the youth of old age,’ so I pass that on to friends when they turn 50.”

Ed was a poet, in our legacy of poets in the pulpit. And he encouraged personal daily meditation. His book of daily meditations was greeted with enthusiasm by members of the congregation. “Ed got me started reading something inspiring every morning or meditating. Still doing it 25 years later!”

Barbara Pescan and Ann Tyndall Co-ministers 1995-2003

Barbara and Ann were our first experience of co-ministry. They were also our first women ministers. They led the congregation toward Welcoming Congregation certification. They led the congregation in our Mission/Vision development, culminating in our current mission statement.

Barbara and Ann were instrumental in establishing leadership for the women’s programs at UCE in the 90’s.

“I loved the contrast between Ann, rational and cool, and Barbara, passionate and spiritual.”

Barbara Pescan 1995-2003 Co-minister, Solo 2003-2011

Barbara Pescan strongly urged and supported work outside the church for social justice. She encouraged the church to be visible in the community as advocating social justice: She led the campaign whereby the congregation deliberated respectfully and then decided to mount a banner on the Ridge side of the church "Civil Marriage is a Civil Right," in solidarity with the national UUA banner at the Boston UUA headquarters (across the street from the State House!).

Barbara led the community again in an anti-war campaign, culminating in the congregation taking a public stand against the war in Iraq. Barbara supported the congregation in earning certification as a Peace Advocacy Congregation in 2012.

Barbara set an expectation for poetry and spirituality in sermons. "Her bowling alone sermon!"

Barbara initiated the covenant group program, paid membership staff, shared offering and the worship associate program.

"For my own dedication to this church and her infamous side eye she was so well-known for, I give thanks."

"Ask a question, if your answer comes easily, ask a bigger question."

Sue Sinnamon MRE 1999-2007

Sue Sinnamon continued the strong and lively participation in religious education started by Frank Robertson. She established flexible programming to let teachers come to church.

Sue supported the work of UUSC in the religious education program.

Her focus on intergenerational connection opportunities was great!

Remember the Hunger month-long intersession: the mural, the whole congregation – children and adults -- buying a Heifer Ark (donations amounting to something like

\$1200?), and the Hunger Banquet for Sunday morning coffee hour one Sunday. Powerful!

Kathleen Green intern 2005-6

Kathleen worked hard to revive the women's program tradition at our church

Nancy Shaffer, Interim MRE 2007-8

Nancy Shaffer captured Sue Sinnamon's program in writing, to guarantee its continuation without Sue.

Another poet – such a gift! We could get used to this!

David Pyle Intern 2007-8

David Pyle widened the Peace and Justice scope to embrace those who have served in the military. He began our relationship with Great Lakes Naval Base and served as UU chaplain there.

David taught peace activists to attend to their self-care to maintain internal peace while working for peace elsewhere.

David has the biggest collection of UU jokes on record!

Janet Newman, Interim Senior Minister 2011-2012

Connie Grant MRE 2008-2015

Connie Grant brought us the volunteer Christmas pageant, Our Whole Lives life-span curriculum, and Family and children's worship services. She formalized a UCE philosophy to religious education. She led the naming of the lower level classrooms.

She led the Evanston Model of interim ministry, when Janet Newman unexpectedly resigned. The Evanston Model involved bring the foremost names in the UU national community into the UCE pulpit for ten days each month.

Connie presented some impactful adult ed programming, including "Building your own Theology" and CREDO. "Her CREDO class was instrumental in my forming my UU identity."

"Her benediction remains my favorite."

Bret Lortie 2013-2018

Bret Lortie encouraged us to see groups in our congregation that we had left out: members of the military service and those whose informing mythology includes an idea of God. “He made me feel OK about believing in God.”

Bret led the board to a fuller practice of Policy Governance. He also led in the establishment of the 2-services model of Sunday morning worship services.

Bret hired Eileen Wiviott as Assistant Minister for Social Justice and Membership, modeling the potential for a good team ministry.

Bret led the Black Lives Matter campaign out into the community, including the sign on the Ridge lawn.

TACT – oh,my!

Bret brought Burning Man to us – and the kazoo he brought home as a memento. Bret brought his unconventional and colorful band to the Sunday morning experience. He encouraged the trombones. His David Bowie and gentle masculinity sermons!

Bret encouraged the social justice work in the congregation and was visible as a minister in the Evanston and Chicago demonstrations.

Bret worked to include the possibility of God: “He was the ‘universal translator’ for teaching me that “god is LOVE”!

Bret pushed to get the elevator to the lower level. He brought in Vickie for the choir.

Bret instituted the Animal Blessing service.

Bret’s sermons: Process theology and meditation to expand our understanding of spiritual life. Sermon he gave after Trump’s election – realistic, hopeful.

His hockey metaphor in his sermon: “skating to where the puck is going to be.”

His sermon on “Religion in Pop Culture”: It made me read American Gods. I’m a Neil Gaiman fan now

Kevin DeBeck intern 2014

Kevin had pure, simple, straightforward sermons.

Absolute mastery of Star Trek trivia.

Susan Frances intern 2015-18

Chaplain for the youth CON

quiet strength

patient!

Mary Shelden DLRE 2015-2018

Mary was a congregational leader during a difficult time – she befriended us, in all its meaning.

Mary instituted intergenerational activities like Pi Day.

Greg Stewart Interim Senior Minister 2018-2019

Greg preached on the importance of mystery

Another fan of mid-century modern

Greg shared the journey of his family with us. He and his husband enriched us with their deep love and investment in the lives of their sons an

It was the intent of this effort to begin to shift the story toward a different expectation of ministry. It is my intention to offer at least two more sermons specifically related to the role and relationship of congregation to minister.