

Dear friends,

Thanks for coming to this column to read my reflections, and my best rendering of what I think you might want to know about the work of the board. Remember that you can be in touch with me anytime at [president@uucharlottesville.org](mailto:president@uucharlottesville.org).

I write this as the board and staff return from a Friday night and Saturday work session with our UUA District Executive responsible for congregational life. We had engaged him—Reverend Kenn Hurto—to help us as we worked to improve the way this congregation experiences the ministry. Kenn has served many UU congregations and is a recognized expert in congregational and leadership development. We spent eight hours working together on how we lead, govern, communicate, assess and support the ministry and the board. We left with better knowledge and tools, more practice working together effectively, and some good, practical suggestions.

You might be interested to know that these services are free to us—part of the service we receive as a Unitarian Universalist congregation, paid for by the UUA GIFT program. We are responsible for Kenn's modest travel costs; we wanted to have us all together for a work session. We can continue to consult with him over the phone, in email or videoconference.

Here's just a sample of what we came away with:

- We have agreed to and scheduled a quarterly review of agreed-to goals, in which we'll review our progress against the strategic plan as well as specific board and staff goals.
- We agreed on what we want to see in the Minister's monthly reports to the board.
- We found some ways to increase our conversational communication with the congregation, and we'll start hosting an informal meeting the Sunday after board meetings, for those who'd like to talk about what we covered. I expect the first one to be on December 20 after the second service. Let me know if you'd like to get a notice about the meetings.
- We will invite an observer to our board meetings to notice our process and give us feedback on our work together.
- We talked again about the Pulse Survey and how to best process its information, and how to continue to gather and reflect back the wisdom of the congregation. I will work with the Committee on the Ministry on this one.
- We learned some things that will be useful when we orient the next board.
- We explored but didn't come to full consensus on leaving board meetings with "one voice."
- We talked about good stewardship. Here's one bit of Kenn's advice: When you welcome people to membership, make sure they know the extent to which volunteers perform and fund the work of this church.

Make sure they understand that you will ask them for their time, talent and treasure. It makes the asking easier when it is expected.

- We left with many other suggestions to explore. Kenn specifically offered us support as we explore our assessment process, build a program budget, and better manifest leadership from both the board and the minister.

While much of this wasn't about the performance of the Minister, some of it was. In the meeting that followed this retreat, the board voted 10-1 to affirm our commitment to this Ministry and Minister. We want to publicly recognize the talent, skill and experience, and deep goodness of this person we called to Ministry. We want to recognize the strong improvements he has made already in worship, in engagement, in leadership, in pastoral care. We want to recognize the improved management of his well-being and his renewed energy for our church. We want him to know that the board is deeply committed to his success and to supporting him and doing our own part for this beloved community.

Are we declaring victory and moving on? Whitewashing our problems? Silencing criticism? None of the above. We continue on the path of improvement. We continue to be open to your feedback—good, bad, and ugly—on how we are doing. We continue to be actively vigilant so we make early course corrections. We, all of us, are committed to doing better for you.

And I'll say by way of closing prayer that many things about our community are filling my heart. May I mention just one: I will again mentor a fabulous young woman through her Coming of Age year, and my heart is already responding to the joy that this offers. The young women I have mentored in the past are a part of my spiritual DNA, part of why I love this church, part of my very modest legacy. They simply go out in the world and do better than those of us who went before them.

With blessings and gratitude,  
Laura