

## **UUCOB Board Advance Feb 10 2022**

**Present:** Dennis Mohler, Dennis Tromba, Lee Fallon, Cathie Field, Lillian Drab-Braddick and Rev Nathan Hollister (both staff of UUA [Southern Region](#) in [Congregational Life](#))

### **Introductions:**

*Lillian Drab-Braddick*

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Lillian is a member of the Congregational Life Staff in our Southern Region, whose team mission is to bring more hope, love, justice, courage, and joy into the world. The Southern Region Congregational Life Staff serve the Unitarian Universalist faith by fostering congregational health and vitality. Lillian came to Unitarian Universalism as a youth and holds a special place in her heart for youth ministry. She was fortunate to be engaged in campus ministry as an undergrad and has worked to pay this gift forward by developing and supporting young adult leadership at the congregational level. Her graduate work in nonprofit management led Lillian from an early career in domestic violence advocacy to service to our faith as a religious professional.

*Rev Nathan Hollister*

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Rev. Nathan Hollister is a third generation Unitarian Universalist whose grandparents founded four of our congregations. He has been a community organizer for over 20 years, and has been active nationally in our faith since he was a teenager. He serves as adjunct faculty at Meadville Lombard, from which he graduated in 2013. “Nato” also leads the ministry of Sacred Fire Unitarian Universalist, which plants and grows covenanted communities, and which trains and equips our congregations to be more effective and impactful in their work for racial and social justice. He lives in central North Carolina, and spends his extra time fomenting rebellious communities, playing in punk and metal bands, and competing in the Highland Games.

Opening words and chalice lighting were led by Lillian. The group discussed the importance of ritual and the power of ritual, particularly at times of transition. She then outlined the theme of today's gathering, which was to help the board with a wider framing of this time of transition. The agenda is:

- Honoring our shared ministry
- Exploring this time of transition
- An overview of what shared ministry is and the congregations hopes and dreams for the future
- A review of our transitional roadmap
- Final discussion and questions
- Closing

We began with a review of the UUCOB mission of fostering wonder, creating connections, nurturing hope, and working for justice. Rev Nathan expressed that our mission should be understood to be a covenant with the congregation. Lillian charged us to consider three questions as we move through this process:

1. What are we ultimately here to do?
2. What happens when our work is done?
3. What will our future look like when we are done?

### **Honoring the Shared Ministry**

Lillian: Endings should focus on celebrating accomplishments, expressions of gratitude and assaying goodbye in a way that will be remembered with satisfaction. We need to honor where we have been in a good way, and that civility and fairness are expected from everyone. The board may need to exercise leadership to keep the congregation focused on these points and avoid the phenomena of "intense truth telling" that can infiltrate as one minister leaves and another potentially steps forward. Modeling a non-anxious presence to the congregation is strongly encouraged. The board was encouraged to set and hold boundaries and be especially aware of how we are engaging and communicating with the congregation.

David expressed the belief that the congregation is confused about the phrase "shared ministry". Rev Nathan provided this insight: shared ministry is a post-reformation concept, where it is a "priesthood of all believers" (or in UU terms a prophethood of all believers) – "if God is Love and everyone goes to heaven we need to focus on the here and now".

## **Exploring this time of transition**

Dennis wanted to explore a bit more about the UUCOB long tradition of creating connections, fostering wonder and nurturing hope – his observation is that these concepts have transcended whoever is “in the pulpit”, and are the essence of the UUCOB. Aspiring to do more as a congregation is admirable but he does not want to “lose the magic” of connection and spontaneity. Rev Nathan observed how we are transformed by the fleeting, unplanned moments.

David wanted to consider how we think about worship in our community: what are our rituals? Our Sunday gatherings seem to be one of rest and connection. Is a sermon necessary for that to happen? Rev Nathan concurred that creating refuge from the world that is going on around us is needed at this time. He explained a bit more about his work in establishing covenanted communities within UU (ref here: [https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/c/covenanting\\_communities\\_faq\\_7.11.17.docx.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/c/covenanting_communities_faq_7.11.17.docx.pdf) )

## **Overview and Hopes and Dreams for Shared Ministry**

Going forward, what do we **keep?**

- Keep the feeling of connection and community (David)
- Keep building the community (Dennis)
- Keep the ritual of a Sunday service (Lee)
- Keep a whole world view as part of our Sunday service (Cathie)
- Keep a ministerial presence with a “bit more depth” to appeal to our community and congregation (Dennis)

Rev Nathan explained that in our geographical region the median reimbursement package for a full-time minister is \$57,400 per year, however we live in a unique environment that may appeal to an older minister who is looking towards retirement and does not desire a full-time position. His experience is that some UU ministers are amazing preachers while other may be less stellar but have significant pastoral care skills. We are at a time where we have an ability to view via Zoom or streaming almost any UU minister and may allow our transition team the ability to focus on the type of professional ministerial skillset that would work best for our congregation.

What do we **stop?**

- Stop the amount of music and especially the “inept” hymns that we cannot sing; stick to a few easy songs that the congregation sings well (Dennis)
- Stop trying to do music via Zoom but figure out the best way to use music to enhance a sermon (Cathie) – Rev Nathan suggested the use of UU congregations shared videos (which we have already started to use)
- Stop some of the niche complications that distract UUCOB from focusing on the mission or the realistic scope of what we can do given the number of people we have (Lee)
- Stop agreeing to things that require more effort than the people who suggest it are willing to invest their own time towards (David)

Rev Nathan stated that we as the board should respond with “great idea, go find 4 other people and get this going”. That congregations tend to wish that a lot of things and if they are “collectively dreaming” about these issues they need to take the responsibility to make them happen. He also challenged that we do not have to do “all the church things every single week”. In the past, small congregations were told to look at what the big churches are doing, do that and you can be a big church too – except that doesn’t work. The philosophy has now shifted to “you do you” – having a sermon every Sunday is one way of doing church but not the only way of doing church. Sunday worship can be a workshop, potluck, group discussion as well as a sermon. The sermon can be short with a discussion period afterwards . . . Lee asked how we get the congregation to not fear change, and that ritual is being together, not reading the same script every week. How do we accept that our covenant is about our connection to each other and not about what is going on while we are sitting passively in the meetinghouse. Rev Nathan has a few sermons that address change and fear and would be happy to be a guest minister at a future service.

What do we start?

- Expand or change up our sense of ritual (David)
- New ways of viewing what a meaningful Sunday service can be and might be (Cathie)
- Since we will likely be at least a year to find a minister (if we go that direction), create a framework to assure the congregation of connection during that time by exploring different things (David and Dennis)

Rev Nathan reviewed several options – guest preachers via Zoom, lay lead services – for one small congregation he works with they have a rotation where the first Sunday is small groups, the second a potluck, the third is a

family fun day and the final is social justice project time – that there are many ways we can gather and minister to each other

Lillian Drab-Braddick shared this definition on Shared Ministry from Natalie Briscoe (UUA Southern Region Congregational Life Staff):

“Shared Ministry is the ways in which the church leadership (professional and lay, volunteer and paid) work together to co-create Unitarian Universalism with the congregation and move the community into its missional priorities”

Rev Nathan and Lillian shared these inspirations and resources as we move forward:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ft2reFzQtOI>

UUA Settlement handbook:

[https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/s/settlement\\_handbook.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/s/settlement_handbook.pdf)

UUA Transitional Ministry handbook:

[https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/t/transitional\\_ministry\\_handbook.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/t/transitional_ministry_handbook.pdf)

UUA Resources regarding Ministerial search:

<https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/transitions>

Checklist for Congregational Boards Engaging in a Settled Ministry Search:

[https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/b/board\\_search\\_checklist.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/b/board_search_checklist.pdf)

## **Review of Transitional Roadmap**

Rev Nathan clarified the difference between a transitions team and a ministerial search team . . . we are now in a time of transition, and we (the board) should select a transitions team and then have them be engaged with the congregation. The board needs to be honest about what “time, talent and treasure” we possess as a congregation and as individuals. Communication with the congregation needs to be open and transparent.

Lillian cautioned that sometimes overcommunication can rebound and create more anxiety – give people what they need to know and roll that out when they need to know it.

## **Final discussions, questions and closing**

Lee asked for clarification regarding the congregational costs associated with a ministerial search – Rev Nathan discussed that candidates we are interested in would typically be flown out and provided with lodging in the broad area, with them planning to provide a guest sermon at a nearby UU congregation (such as VaBeach). Typically the candidate flies in on a Friday, has dinner with the board and/or transition team that evening, is in meetings with the appropriate individuals Saturday and then is observed Sunday as they provide their sermon. Generally speaking you would do this with around 3 candidates. In this day of Zoom, it may be possible to limit some of the costs associated with this by doing some or all of this via Zoom.

When a final candidate is identified, they are invited here for “candidating week” – we bring them out and lodge them while they meet with the congregation and congregational leadership and provides a Sunday service. After this week, the entire congregation votes on the minister. If the congregational vote is not at least 95% in favor, the UUA typically advises the minister to not accept the call.

If the congregation offers a Letter of Call to the candidate and it is accepted, the congregation will pay relocation costs for this individual.

Lillian closed this time together with this poem by Rumi:

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you  
Don't go back to sleep*

*You must ask for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep*

*People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
where the two worlds touch,*

*The door is round and open  
Don't go back to sleep*