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Check-In

Let us remember check-in as a prayer. We are grateful for the time to hear about our loves, our challenges, our ministries.

We pray for our colleagues and their families with health concerns- lymphoma, broken bones, angina, and pneumonia, We especially remember Josh Pawleck and his son Mason as they face surgery.

We lift up each other as we face the opportunity and the danger in the transitions within our families: engagements, marriages, births, empty nests, and separation.

We are especially grateful for this time of respite from the demands and challenges of our ministries as we say good-bye to beloved congregations, prepare to fall in love with new ones, look forward to retirement, enjoy sabbatical, imagine new staff, mourn too many losses, wonder about the blossoming, the weirdness, the plateaus,

May this time be a blessing to our families, our selves, the church and movement we serve.

Blessed Be and Amen.

Monday Evening

Program chair, Tom Chulak, introduced the program with the invitation to listen to six short papers, each to be followed by dialogue. He invited us into a time of reflection that will inspire action.

Rosemary Bray McNatt presented the first paper, "A Fire Exists by Burning" in which she explored the missionary history of the Unitarian and Universalist churches. The Universalist story is filled with vigorous efforts and good slogans. The Unitarian story of missionary efforts is less direct and full of tensions arising out of ongoing ambivalence about identity.

Tom Chulak began our discussions with an invitation to expand on the history of Unitarian Universalist missionary history.

Tom Wintle reminded us that there were two Western Unitarian Groups- the Western Conference which was Humanist and the Western Unitarian Association which was Christian.

Charles Steven remarked that the church he serves was formed by folks who reacted to Billy Sunday's preaching against Unitarians, Bob Thayer told the story of the Unitarian church of Helena MT, started by the conference in 1890-a conflict closed the church in 1917 when the minister left. The building houses the Helena Repertory Theatre.

John Westin reminded us that Emerson made a swing thru the West just when folks were getting back from war and were ready to settle down in families. He had some influence in Kansas.

Nina Grey talked about the history of church plantings in Chicago some of which were destroyed by the fire.

Joel remarked on the effects of conflict between the Christian and humanist factions in Columbus Ohio. , German Indep. Church affiliated with AUA but

withdrew in 1936 as a result of the debate. 8 years later a group split off and founded the Unitarian church of Columbus.

Anita and Tom Chulak reflected on the success of the fellowship movement begun in 1948 by Frederick May Elliot (Monroe Hudson). Of the the 500 fellowships created, 200 remain.

Anita and Tom Wintle debated the meaning of the word “success” which might be measured by capacity to share ministry-

Dick Fewkes reminded us of the work of the AUA=pamphlet society. And the success of the Ad-“Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?”

Marta added to the story of Jenkin Lloyd Jones’ mentoring of the Iowa sisterhood.

Tom Chulak invited us to share other reflections.

Tom Wintle was of the opinion that a lack of theological clarity means lack of mission. Gail Seavey added that the same is true in Universalist splits.

Rosemary emphasized that the more theological agreement the more likely there will be ease with mission. Unitarians would grow, then argue about theology and shrink. The Universalists always had a shared “good word” about Jesus.

Kendra made a systemic observation about Unitarians getting outwardly focused, become anxious about change and then fight about what was missing from their focus

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Susan wondered if other religions have fights about creed and question of authority. She observed that other mainline religions are not clear in the

pews either and that there is great diversity. noted that the authority of who gets to define is the issue.

Marta observed that the Iowa sisterhood were not troubled by theological ambiguity but rather were able to dig in to real life, While not great thinkers, they were “can do” sorts of people.. Tom Wintle: agreed that though they were not deep, but they were clear.

Bob Thayer reflected on the churches that grew in the shadow of a hero with no organization left in place to keep it going.

Fred, on the point of clarity, observed that Joel Ostein had a garbled message, didn't require Christian beliefs but drew 30,000. Fred wondered if we need that.

Anita resonated with entrepreneurial spirit. She believes that what matters is believing that being there will save peoples lives. That's what grows churches, that's what the prophets are about. God asks “whom shall I send/” Rosemary, Tom, and Bob talked about Preston Bradley and A Powell Davies who were well known public personalities.

Charles reinforced the point that the messenger is important.

Rosemary noted that Systems theory made renewed sense.as she read Unitarian history. We've been having the same congregational conflicts in every generation.

Tom Chulak presented the second paper of the evening “New Wine and New Wineskins.” Tom challenged us to understand our religious pluralism as a “mixed wine” that needs the new wineskin of new institutional forms, Our

conversation unpacked the metaphor. Tom answered Anita's request to say more about the metaphor of wineskin, saying "Chalice is a form.

Partnership is a form. Faith based bridge building requires a sense of urgency. Form is Clarity of roles of relationships, going deeper into history as a source of our faith is a form. Being more contextually grounded is a form. Non-patriarchal wine need non patriarchal forms.

Jim wondered if the wine we serve newcomers isn't an acquired taste and that We need to find a way to give something to newcomers Nannene: suggested that Concord Grapes are needed for the /Transcendental wine recipe.;

Tom reminded us that we find our grapes in the sources

Nina explored freedom as both the wine and the container for love she has been wondering about authority to call anything truth as she has explored congregational pluralism.

John Westin: reminded us that Congregations that are vital are telling their own story rather being a denomination

Joel: wondered what happens when someone can't drink the wine? He observes that a certain sort of intelligence us required.

Rosemarie believes we need to be more intentional about explaining who we are in liturgy and added a new metaphor from Krister Stendahl. She said he "didn't like Us because they would pick flowers from others peoples gardens and make bouques-no roots."

Susan brought us back to wine and reminded us that wine is not only tasted but also consumed for an effect. She wonders what effect we are having on people's lives.

Rosemary spoke to Joel's concern. She has one message that she can say to anyone; Nothing can separate us from the love of god is the belief that I can

say to anyone. Kendra: wondered about the word “Faith” and what it means in a UU context.

Tom Wintle observed that UU’s have an increasing need to use religious language in the last 20 years. He defined Faith as a trust in this life that will get you thru.

Fred returned us to the chalice symbol as used by The humiliati. The chalice cup was ever present as a symbol of sacrifice, but it was never explained.

Anita agreed that we do a disservice explaining symbols and stories. **Bob** invited us to serve feminism and paganism-fine wines that fit with the meal of our lives at certain times.

Tom Wintle led our evening chapel in which we lay down our burdens and received the prayer of laughter.

Tuesday

Rosemarie Smurzinski led chapel. Our communion reminded us of the simple art of remembrance and celebration.

Tom Chulak invited us into a time of reflection on Monday’s papers. Tom Wintle commented on the built in tension between the desire to build up the denomination and helping the larger body of the community. Dick added that the strong antipathy to proselytizing gets in the way of mission.

Nanene noticed that Friedman was right about how systems keep on replicating themselves.

Rosemary told us how she felt those systemic waves of tension while reading history; She believes that we are in the next wave of tension around proselytizing. Will described the pattern initiated by an individual with mission who spreads a message, Then the message flattens, differences arise in the message, followed by conflict loss of mission-He wondered, “ Is this

UU or human pattern. “Nanene reminded us of context when she said “The rise of UU membership goes along with country becoming more conservative.” Fred reminded us that in our story the Universalists had formal missionaries while the Unitarians never did.

Tom quoted Universalist Quillin Shin who said: ‘Why would anyone want to be minister without being a missionary.’”

Gail Seavey shared her paper, ‘ On Building Heaven on Earth or Castles in the Air; Reflections On the Incarnation of Church Mission” Her good work challenges us to find ways to move people through a developmental arc of membership that brings each person to a place of serving in the world. In the discussion that followed

Dick Fewkes remembered the Lend a Hand Club. We then explored the different meaning we have for the word ‘mission” Nina wondered is it to creat UU’s or to is mission about our larger purpose for social justice.

Fred: reminded us that Warrn’s mission is to get them in the door while We try to do everything. Anita added that Warren delegates and that scripture supports that delegation. She believes that Warren’s work and our work are the same:

bringing people’s lives into alignment with their values.

The conversation shifted to the notion of individual and corporate discernment of mission. Charles noted that -strategic planning is our equivalent to discernment.

Rosemarie obsesrved that interim ministry is a time of discernment of the sorts of gifts needed after a particular ministry.

Bill got us thinking about worship when he reminded us that in Warren’s church-Wednesday’s worship is for members while Sunday is for the larger community. Bill wondered what can we do differently in our worship life?

Bob thought we could put more emphasis on transformation and find a way to make religion a 7 day a week orientation. Mary was excited about the theme of hospitality that the Winchester church is exploring this year . She observed that , unlike Warren, she does not have the authority to say to congregants, “I have an agenda larger than your personal preferences
Rosemary remarked that when UU’s are transformed they have no where to go except to seminary. Joel wondered, after reading the Purpose Driven Life: whether replacing the “web” with Jesus doesn’t work better for the work of transformation.

Susan Suhoski read Brian Kopke’s untitled paper in which he took us through a journey from fear to generosity within himself and in the Ottawa congregation.

Tom and Marta told stories of working with boards and committees to give away the plate. In Marta’s case the congregation has more than doubled giving on Sunday morning.

Bob: described the transformative faith based organizing in the Brockton church which is tiny and yet very effective.

We enjoyed a rousing reading of Tracy Sprowls Jenks paper Bill Gardiner. “The Meeting House on the Common” invited us to “theologize, sermonize, visualize, prophesize, organize, and realize because “our UU nature and identity calls us to transformation.”

We finished the morning together with Anita Farber-Robertson’s passionat paper, “Connecting With the Religiously Liberal.”Anita spoke of the challenges, barriers, and transformative opportunities in the work of

connecting to the religious folks outside of our own churches. She reminds us of our mission, in the words of Henri Nouwen, to convert the hostis into the hospes, the enemy in to the guest, with the creation of free and fearless space.

Our afternoon program invited us into six small group discussion. Change of pace continued the small group wineskin form. The wine of play was delightful and effective in transforming our day. Evening chapel, led by Jim Sherblom, reminded us of our perfection in our wholeness.

Wednesday

Chapel; Frank Hall: We were reminded of the moment when a person took us into their confidence and made us ministers.

- Small group insights

Devise a vision of what a spiritual person looks like: community, accountability, spiritual practice based on Warren's understanding of process. We need to arm our parishioners to keep growing without going to seminary. Rosemary has experienced people looking for places for spiritual direction. How can we give that?

What would a seeker worship look like? Have inner circle appreciations on Wednesday night.

We need to attend worship of others to be supported.

How do we use varied sources. Is that shallow and unrooted or an appreciation? Are we really embodying pluralism?

- Integration with primary readings

Fred found Durall negative.

Why is it so popular? Nina thinks it appeals to the individualism of the complaint culture from the unsatisfied. This is the methodology of science

which is doubt and complaint, according to Joel. We cannot live be critique alone. Paul wonders what the need is that is not being met for intense spiritual experience. Will observed that praise, gratitude is the ground of worship. UU culture is grounded in criticism. Our challenge is to grow up toward appreciative consciousness. Look at Bernie Mallen work on appreciative consciousness.

Rose adds that being called to a noble work connects people to a role in the formation of a new world-“The great work.”

Dick experiences worship as church because he is spiritually fulfilling and authentic. Evangelists provide “almost church” for Dick because of the the lack of language and symbolism that speaks to him.

Nina points to need for healing as well as appreciation. We need an acknowledgement of lack found in the Psalms.

Charles was drawn to the critique that appeals offers a great work to reach beyond the doors- Call to commitment appeals.

John Westin is critical of the editing of the book because it ends in fantasy rather than vision. How do you get from stakeholders to new vision?

Mary reported that whole standing committee has read and discussed all year. I use call to commitment and to leadership. It addresses the anxiety our congregations have about ministerial authority. The church planting effort, Pathways, ranslates our faith into an evangelical model. Mary is distressed about the investment we are making in our name. While it is too soon to evaluate, the issue needs our concern. It felt like a UU version of the Stepford wives-very removed from connected, substance. It felt packaged and ungrounded. Mary asks then about her authority to ground UU identity. If this is what is going to get people engaged and transformed in liberal religion I'd like to give it a chance, but it felt creepy, I was alarmed. Tom

Chulak experience the opposite-he was excited by the creativity of forms. “This has the potential to transform Uuism.” This was all about changing wineskins not the wine.”

Joel describes Kendras faith as cherishing where people are. . .why can't we do with our movement.

The Pathways movement has called a minister and DRE who are new to our movement.

Children are in the whole service. The roles of staff are different-a minister of worship plus a sr. minister. They have a family ministry. They are called Pathways. They are creating new forms and new language.

Tom wonders “Will they keep people without a commitment to Christ?”

Anita thinks that there can be a pluralist way of doing worship without devaluing our historical forms of worship. Rosemarie is committed to reading UU history as a way of addressing how change happens in our tradition. Frank Hall observes that we live in a culture of marketing and strategic planning. He is hearing that the UU church in Westport will be a religious mall in 25 years.

Rose shared thinking of J Elwood Nash in the 19th century who suggested that we hold church in theatres. We need to go where the people are. They had a preaching experiment around that.

Mary clarified that she is concerned about authenticity rather than discomfort with change. Paul emphasized that it is not about numbers, that we have something to share that changes lives. We have a responsibility to go where they are. Tom Chulak reported on the words of Martin Marty' observations of the use of technology in the fundamentalist worship. Bob reminds us that the greatest preachers preached on hillsides and welcomed

native Americans. They had an “affection” experience. This was the new technology. Nannene worries that people come to church to be entertained.