

Report on Developing Effective Clergy and Leadership (DECAL) Talking Circles and Healing Circles for Past Board Members

Summary

The second tough task of interim transition, after history, is leadership. The Nominating Committee and the Interim Transition Task Force agreed we needed to include our past board members, and we organized two healing circles for them. Additionally, the congregation was offered two (2) talking circles to discuss aspects of leadership.

The twelve (12) past board member participants served during ministries from the late '60's to 2013. Most board members agreed their experience was "a mixed bag" of extremes—good and bad. Feeling lonely and isolated from the rest of the church was widespread, especially when dealing with personnel issues. Participants agreed that the church needs to effectively train board members and emotionally support them while they serve. Participants offered to be a resource for future board members. However, some thought is needed to figure out how this might happen.

During the DECAL talking circles, the sixteen (16) participants easily dealt with the three (3) questions defining leadership, how members can show leadership, and how we support leaders. However, participants struggled with the question on the nature of authority we give our leaders and how we recognize that authority. Interesting differences in thinking emerged. Six (6) participants named the democratic process for conferring authority and saw asking questions and supporting decisions as appropriate recognition. Three (3) participants talked about authority given to voluntary leaders and the lack of support they receive. Two (2) participants saw authority given to those able to communicate vision and experience. Another participant spoke of empowerment and supporting leaders even when we don't understand the decisions. Other participants recognized they have difficulty with the idea of giving authority to others—either preferring to do things themselves or wanting to take authority back if things don't go well. One participant suggested that as a church we need to look to other organizations for working models.

These differing responses, about nature of authority we give our leaders and how we recognize that authority, reflect the complexity of leadership in our church. In performance improvement language, this may be an area of opportunity for the church to explore. If we can agree on who has authority to do what and who needs to be involved, that could help us on our way forward.

Details on the circles and the contributions made are given below.

Healing Circles for Past Board Members

Twelve (12) people, including facilitators attended two Healing Circles for past board members on Wednesday 5/10 and Sunday 5/17.

Most healing circle participants came because they were asked. Some wanted healing for the church, and others wanted healing for themselves. Board members from the 60's to recent times attended. Themes included:

- Board experience is mixed bag of extremes—good and bad
- As a church we need to become more comfortable handling disagreements, differing expectations

- Tolerance of diverse opinions and dialogue with all voices can help church from being derailed from vision
- Not everyone is cut out to be a board member—which can lead to people doing multiple terms
- Trust was lost when a called minister was mismatched with our church and the UUA was unhelpful to the church in aftermath
- Board experience can be lonely when issues arise that must be handled confidentially
- Church which was once a source of support can become a toxic environment when things go wrong
- More training is needed for board members
- Past board members are willing to provide support to current board members

Developing Effective Clergy and Leadership (DECAL)

Sixteen (16) participants attended talking circles either Sunday 5/17 or Wednesday 5/20.

The questions and responses for the circles were:

1. *What does leadership mean in our church?*

- (4 people) Making hard decisions and dealing with tough issues; thinking of the greater good; seeing the big picture; remaining grounded
- (3 people) Communicate and bring our mission/vision alive
- (3 people) Motivate team/empower others to achieve goals and/or move organization in positive direction
- (2 people) Respect other people and be willing to listen; objective but compassionate
- (2 people) Step forward and be visible

2. *How can each one of us be a leader?*

- (4 people) Be in the moment and appreciate what is going on; being a good follower; listening; encouraging others; accept leaders can make mistakes
- (3 people) Connect with others and share our resources; ask questions to understand task and delegate work as needed; step outside comfort zone and ask for help as needed; people are like pieces of a quilt: together we make a whole greater than the individual parts
- (3 people) Practice saying, “How can I help?” or “How can I help the church move forward?”; find own passion and volunteer to help;
- (2 people) Be positive
- Use our UU values; acting or service to something larger than ourselves

3. *What is the nature of authority we give to leaders and how do we recognize it?*

- (6 people) (nature of authority) democratic; vote; handle problems; how we use resources; (recognition) respect; support decisions and ask questions; trust and faith; helper to their role; question if needed and tell them we support their authority
- (3 people) (nature of authority) voluntary; behind the scenes (recognition) don't do it very well; respect and honor; surprises lead to targets and scapegoats
- (2 people) (nature of authority) experience and vision; (recognition) trust but verify; volunteer
- (nature of authority) empowerment; (recognition) trust even when we don't understand decisions

- finds it easier let others take control when can talk individually with them
- can have unrealistic expectations of leaders—give authority for handling problems and take it back if doesn't like what happens
- Need to look at other organizations for working models

4. *How do we support our leaders?*

- (6 people) Objective, respectful communication, honesty; be positive; give constructive feedback; stay out of triangles and talk to person directly as needed
- (4 people) Stay informed; attend meetings they organize; show active support. Offer and give help. Be clear ourselves about what we think and what we can and can't do
- (2 people) This question has promoted introspection; working out how can do more to help church and leaders
- (2 people) Say thanks! Be present with them.
- Would love to see leadership council to provide support/safety net to help leaders when they are in tough situations
- Assume good intention, suspend judgment; seek information
- Figure out a better way to orient people new to the church about all that is involved in church governance

Respectfully submitted,

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