

## **Report of Board of Directors Subcommittee on Root Cause Determination and Implementation of Communications Study Recommendations**

April, 2016

On January 19, 2016 the UUCGT Board of Directors created a special task group with the following 3 assigned tasks.

1. To determine the underlying cause of the recurrent upheavals in our congregation.
2. To explore ways to implement the findings of the Communications task group.
3. Recommend criteria for selection of a facilitator to facilitate the resolution of the identified cause(s) and promote healing of residual emotional issues persisting from our disruptions.

The members of this committee included John Hoffmann, Loraine Anderson and Linda Fletcher. Donna Stein-Harris later joined the group.

Following is a summary of the committee's recommendations regarding each of these assigned tasks.

### **TASK I: THE CAUSAL DETERMINATION ASSIGNMENT**

It has been widely recognized within this congregation that our current upheaval is the most recent in a chain of similar disruptions spread over many years. In an attempt to understand the present dynamics and to diminish the likely recurrence of such circumstances in the future it was determined important to understand causal factor(s) associated with the periods of discord. This group was tasked with determining the root cause of these recurring incidents.

The committee met several times to discuss ways in which historical data could be gathered and analyzed to find common threads. The real challenge was to gather needed data without disrupting the fragile peace that had recently been established. This included informal verbal histories from various long time congregants, review of membership data, review of past minutes and reports from consultants and spiritual leaders and obtaining a sense of the perspective of the UUA on this long standing problem. A summary of these findings, a statement of the problem and some options regarding future actions based on these findings are presented below.

## SECTION I. DATA COLLECTION

### A. VERBAL HISTORIES AND MEMBERSHIP DATA

Discussions with several long time members, all the way back to our founder, MaryAnn Force, revealed a rich 50 year congregational history that began with a very close knit fellowship. Emmy Lou Belcher was employed as the first spiritual leader in 1990 when the group of about 70 decided to grow their ranks. Although her tenure is reported as having been fairly tranquil, during her 15 years she introduced little in the way of change to the fellowship model that had been the structural basis of the organization since inception.

It was reported that from Emmy Lou's departure in 2005 until Chava came on board in 2014, some 9 years later, we experienced 4 different spiritual leaders and three periods of significant discord. Only one minister was employed in a permanent capacity and he departed after 3 years. When Chava came on board in September of 2014 our numbers were approximately 140. As of January of this year, some 16 months later, we had 212 members. As of early April, 2016 the total number of members is difficult to count as there seems to have been a significant lack of response to our pledge drive which is possibly reflective of a change in the total membership count. The important point here is that the congregation has grown significantly, in fact tripled, during the past 26 years and that it experienced a surge in membership when Chava came on board. What began as a fellowship that was lay led and structurally simplistic evolved into a program sized congregation that requires not only a designated spiritual leader but also the administrative structure associated with meeting the needs and expectations of larger congregations.

### B. REVIEW OF CHURCH ANNALS

A thorough review of the minutes and reports generated through the years was originally planned. However, it appears we might wish to improve our record keeping for little of value was available for review.

John Hoffman, our committee member served as the Board Chair during the 2010-2011 time when Barbara Childs served as a consultant. He was able to provide copies of some minutes that were generated regarding some but not all of the workshops she conducted during that year. We were unable to find any additional documentation of her work with the exception of her initial report that addressed her assessment of how to work with the congregation to deal with the recurrent unrest....her plan of action. Thinking there was a missing final report which outlined the actions taken and the results there of she was contacted for the purpose of retrieving that summary document. It was learned that no such document had been generated. Fortunately, the minutes John provided clearly stated that the workshop participants ultimately identified the root cause of our dissonance. (See SECTION I below). So, even though there was no follow through to address resolution of the identified cause of our turbulence, it is important to note that as a result of this work not only had the root cause been identified but it had been discovered, agreed upon and articulated NOT by an external source but from within our own congregation.

### C. INTERVIEW WITH LISA PRESLEY

A discussion with Lisa Presley, of the UUA Heartland District, provided a long term perspective concerning this congregation and a wealth of general knowledge regarding the genesis and resolution of conflicts in congregations. Following are the summation of some of her sage comments:

1. The vast majority of congregational conflict (i.e. > 95%) center around issues of power and control.
2. The UUA has long been actively involved in dealing with the resolution of conflict in congregations and has created a manual to deal with such. Entitled "The Janus Manual", this work is designed to assist congregations and spiritual leaders in transition. One of the primary authors of this work is Barbara Childs, UUCGT consultant for the 2010-2011 timeframe.
3. Because problems of this nature are very complex and highly charged with emotions she recommended the services of a facilitator capable of dealing with these difficult feelings be procured early on in any project targeting congregational resolution of conflict.
4. This is a convoluted situation that has evolved over several decades and irrespective of the method implemented to affect change it will not meet with immediate resolution of harsh feelings. The passage of time as well as openly and honestly facing the root causes can lead to gradual healing.

## SECTION II PROBLEM STATEMENT

This congregation is divided into two factions, those who wish to return to the fellowship model that is usually associated with beginning and smaller congregations and those who wish to embrace the standard administrative structure consistent with UUA congregations of program size. Some of the founding members of our congregation have not embraced the changes associated with the growth of the congregation and have actively tried to preserve many aspects of fellowship programs and governance. This yearning for and attempt to return to the old comfortable and well loved ways by a small group of our congregants has resulted in major conflicts through the years. Unfortunately, the contested issues have been many and varied but to date the root cause of the dissonance has not been dealt with.

In some there still exists a yearning for the closeness that was shared in the fellowship that was created in part by governance via mutual agreement and in unwavering accordance with their holy objectives. Although they originally wished to reach out and opened their doors to the greater community it was found that doing so introduced a new way of decision making that was not always in concert with the very successful and fulfilling ways they had experienced in the past. In short, they felt a deep loss of something that had been very sacred. They also felt disenfranchised because the new way of doing and being also represented a loss of their spiritual home as the voices and

choices of the newer congregants gained more strength. Few outside that original group understood or even considered those feelings.

That said, at this juncture the majority of this congregation has an agenda and way of governance that is divergent from the one this small group still clings to..... the fellowship model that was so successful for them in the past. The challenge at hand is to find a way to integrate the two factions and create a functional whole congregation.

### SECTION III OPTIONS

This committee has not been tasked with providing potential solution. Ours was only to identify the root cause. We believe that has been accomplished. However, it is our belief that it is time to confront and deal with the root cause until a mutually agreed resolution is instituted. As indicated by Lisa Presley, this is a long term healing process.

It is our assessment that this issue is of utmost importance to the welfare of the congregation. Further, it is the feeling of this committee that this issue, although currently less volatile than in recent months, is still very unstable under the surface and is in need of immediate attention. Toward that end we recommend a permanent sub committee of the Board of Directors be expeditiously appointed to address the initiation and ongoing resolution of the problem.

### TASK II COMMUNICATIONS

The second task involves developing recommendations for implementing the findings of the Communications task group which, having completed their objective, was disbanded. This includes (1) an overall rededication to the covenant (specifically to the communication elements therein) with (2) accentuated emphasis on every person assuming individual responsibility for projecting and receiving impeccable communications. Although it does not appear that a permanent committee must be established to execute this mission there does need to be an initial targeted and well supported effort in order to launch and begin integration of this concept into the community. Some options to achieve this integration are presented below:

#### OPTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE FINDINGS

1. Reform the independent committee that crafted the recommendations.

##### Advantages

- a. The group is already familiar with the work

##### Disadvantages

- a. The group is large (9 members and 2 facilitators) and arranging meeting times is problematic.

- b. It is not recognized by the congregation as being a formal committee and it has no established connections for communicating with the congregation or with other committees
- 2. Assign the task to an existing committee
  - Advantages:
    - a. Indirectly benefit from association with an established and recognized acting group.
    - b. Duties assumed by existing members; limited recruiting
  - Disadvantage:
    - a. The existing committees may not wish to accept the added work load
    - b. This project may be accepted but not treated as a priority.
- 3. Appoint a Board of Directors subcommittee as outlined in the above discussion in TASK I regarding the root cause and include improvement of congregational communications in their assignment.

#### RECOMMENDATION

This group perceives that the third option provides an efficient path to maximizing functional efficiency in accomplishing both objectives.

#### **TASK III RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACILITATORS**

It is believed that the selection of a facilitator should be based on the approach selected to confront the issues. We are a step ahead of many such processes as we have identified our root problem. However, recommending a facilitator without knowing what will be asked of their performance may not lead to wise choices.