

Report of the PUUC Governing Board on the Results of the Cottage Talk Meetings on Defining Our Shared Ministry Fall 2020

In the Spring of 2020, the congregation of Peterborough Unitarian Universalist Church voted to fund a half-time minister as of July, 2021. In response, the Governing Board has been working to ensure a smooth transition from the current full-time minister model to a model of shared ministry involving a part-time minister, our Music Director, the Religious Education Coordinator, the Church Administrator, and the congregants themselves as partners in ministry.

In October, the Board held three separate Cottage Talk meetings via Zoom for congregants and friends of PUUC. The purpose of these meetings was to gather the information necessary to plan our future shared ministry. The meetings were held on different days of the week and times of day to ensure the maximum number of participants. For several weeks before the Cottage Talks, the Board announced the meetings via group email, in the weekly Cresset and at coffee hour after online services, and, when necessary, sent personal emails and made phone calls. In total, 73 congregants and friends participated in the Cottage Talks, where they were split into small groups to facilitate easier discussion. Additionally, Marybeth, Zoe and Vanessa participated separately in this information gathering process.

Each facilitator of the small group meetings asked eight questions. All of the answers were recorded by a notetaker and compiled into a large master list, which will be made available to all congregants and friends of PUUC. The Board combed through the answers and came up with a list of the most common responses to each question. Those answers are included below. While this list contains only the most common responses, the Board will also look to the master list of answers for ideas and guidance when planning our future shared ministry.

What does Ministry mean to you?

- Being connected to and doing things in a community that cares about each person and everyone together
- Being cared for
- A congregation that comes together with a shared sense of values
- Spiritual guidance that supports and nurtures the soul
- Encouraging, caring for, comforting and inspiring others

Why do you come to PUUC? What do you love about it?

- There was an overwhelming consensus that most people come to PUUC for the people; it is a strong, supportive, and caring community.
- To be inspired and comforted by the services, including the rituals, the music, etc.
- Spiritual guidance and inspiration
- To be part of a congregation
- UU values
- It is a safe place to give and receive, and to find emotional space
- There is a strong sense of sharing
- It is a good place to bring kids

What part of current ministry would you like to retain?

- A mixture of lay and professional led services
- The music (especially Spirit of Life)
- Joys and Concerns
- Our rituals
- Religious Education
- Pastoral care
- Community outreach
- Social justice work
- Social justice candle (* see same response in next section)
- Social events

What part of current ministry should we let go of?

- Traditions or rituals that are not relevant to our current congregation. This requires an inquiry into why we do the things we do. “Because it has always been that way” is not a sufficient answer.
- Social justice candle (*note: some congregants would prefer to reduce the frequency of social justice candles, while others would like to eliminate them altogether because they feel the candles take away from the peacefulness of the service)
- Adult RE (the feeling among some is that this just isn’t being used enough, at least as is.)

- Don't sweat the small stuff
- Squabbling over money

Is there anything you are not getting out of PUUC ministry? Is there something we can add that would help you?

- There was an overwhelming consensus that people would like a minister who reaches out to create personal connections with the congregation; a minister who cares about the congregants personally and someone about whom the congregants care.
- More vibrant and engaging sermons. Some people want the sermons to have more of a personal, emotional approach, others want to be challenged more intellectually.
- Better system of church-wide communication (between minister and congregants and between committees and congregant) and vice versa
- Small group ministry
- Better pastoral care
- More spiritual guidance from services and other happenings
- More variety of service content
- More vibrant traditions
- More opportunities for congregants to get together in meaningful ways
- Better technology for people with hearing and/or vision issues
- More opportunities for group discussion

- In person services (some folks are frustrated with Zoom)

What roles must be filled by the part-time minister?

- Creating personal, caring connections with the congregants
- Inspirational services twice per month
- Having a pulse on the congregation by connecting with people and attending PUUC events
- Set the tone for the church and lead us
- Pastoral care (many people feel that the minister should handle the critical and confidential cases, but that well-trained lay people can handle much of the pastoral care, with ministerial oversight.)
Listen to people who need help
- Major life event/rites of passage

What roles can the Staff perform?

- Most people feel we are blessed with this staff, that they are doing a great job and we don't want to overburden them. There is also an acknowledgement that we should thank them more.
- We should check with them before changing or adding to their responsibilities
- Give them enough autonomy to do what they need to do and to suggest new/different things; trust them; empower and listen to them

What roles can or should be performed by congregants and what are YOU willing to do?

- Pastoral care (with proper training)
- Participating in the worship services in some fashion
- Social justice and community outreach
- Many people told us what they can/would like to help out with. We clearly have a lot of talent in the congregation and much goodwill. We should arrange to have someone put together a database of people's talents ... and use it
- Outreach to Rivermead and other centers
- Strengthen our committees
- Embrace more member-led initiatives

The Board will use these answers, together with the less frequently suggested answers not included here, to help define the structure of our future with a half-time minister. Thanks to all who participated and especially to those who not only participated in a meeting, but also worked as a facilitator or notetaker in a second or even third meeting.