

USG Widening the Circle (WtC)

June 2, 2021 Meeting Notes: Linda Bernstein

Topic: Governance – Session 2

Present: Lee Meinicke, Linda Bernstein, Treva Burger, Lois Murphy, Andrea Barsevick, Lisa Dutton, Margaret Thompson, Rev. Kent Matthies, Devery Howerton, Shobhi Kanal, Ryan Hurd, Elaine Hills, Carla Campbell, Eric Foster, Nancy Anderson, Sarah Frazier, Latifah Griffin-Rogers, Barbara Dowdall

Focus: Congregational Polity/Covenant

Discussion Questions:

How should we educate our community members on congregational polity instead of assuming that they are informed?

When should our community make opportunity to discuss this?

How do we discuss it with those new to our community?

Comments:

Whole congregation culture change.

Maybe a book group. The reading is not easy. Need more examples. The avatar stories are very good.

Very important. Re micro aggressions.

USG Elections. Is it democratic if there is only one slate?

The Cambridge Platform defined congregational polity in the early 1600's. Congregational self-governance and relations between congregations.

- We need to do better at teaching about congregational polity. All year round. Maybe from the pulpit.

Congregational polity involves where religious authority lies. It used to be scripture. Then reformation created religious authority figures. Now each person is the authority, so congregations are democratic.

UU Minister isn't handed down by a central authority (Bishop.)

Theology isn't handed down.

Individualism has run amok. Can result in lack of unity of group or direction.

It is thought that becoming covenantal will attract more people. (UUism has shockingly low numbers nationwide.)

Past few years we have run an open call in the weekly CommUUnicator explaining qualities looked for in leadership and asking people to throw their hat in the ring. This has been done the past few years starting in the winter. Yet, this doesn't make people come forward.

- How to encourage more people to run? Do people notice the call?

If the nominating committee finds 4 good people some people wonder if they stop looking. Amazement that people don't read the CommUUnicator.

- Goal to increase equity inclusivity and diversity in leadership. How do new people learn how to get involved? Board service comes after other things and qualities have been demonstrated. Nom comm goes over entire membership list.
- How to expand the notification about serving on Board? From pulpit?

The period of time prior to annual meeting are very busy months. It is hard to get the message heard.

- Should we increase the size of the nominating committee to have a larger recruiting corps?

- How to communicate welcomeness, invitation to be part of things and to serve?

We are called to be more assertive about being inviting. We want you and your project. If you propose something, we will help you get it off the ground. Need 5 to 1 ratio of praise to criticism.

We want to know how you want to be involved. Worship Arts, Social Justice. Need to over communicate. Surveys of USG show caring is strong.

- Need to build more culture of cultivating how to serve. Inside or outside USG.

Support the value of service through the lens of diversity, inclusivity and anti-oppression.

Before we get to running and voting, educate congregation about congregational polity, at a service.

General print communication may not be effective enough. Need 1 on 1 conversations. Relational. But relational can also be cliquish. This is the paradox and challenge. A core group of people get asked all the time and perpetuates a dominant culture.

During the pandemic no one contacted the membership committee to get more information about the congregation. New people who attended the services via zoom were tracked as well as those who attended multiple times (or otherwise seemed engaged were contacted and invited to a Membership information session. 14 people attended and 7 are going to join! The point is direct inquiry to people seems to be more effective than general communication.

Everyone needs to welcome and cultivate new comers. Last few years the nominating committee looked beyond people we already know. The entire member list was considered, not the first people who come to mind. The committee gathered information considering service, diversity and inclusion. Changes have been made to nominating committee that improved the process.

USG did a lot of work on the new governance structure. How many people know this history? Need list of what Board does/MET does. Are there written policies?

- We don't talk about the polity of our congregation very much. Should be a service. Board led. It would be interesting and illuminating of our beloved community.
- Goals for polity. Explanation to congregation across more venues. Compare our polity to other faith traditions. Where they came from? What issues Board handles? Invite members to read meeting minutes. Link to Board mins in Communicator?

How do people find a path to do what they are interested in? Suggest each committee recruit 3 new members?

The culture of the whole church, not just the job of the ushers, is to welcome people.

We are working hard to decenter whiteness and white centered activities.

Let everyone show their gifts and serve and their passion. Try to become a YES church. Help to get it accomplished. Lean toward saying "Yes" to new ideas vs. "Come to a Meeting". Can an individual in USG who feels a strong calling to a certain activity/ministry find support for that person's idea?

How about lining up a few people to support new ideas? How does USG support people's ideas? What is the mechanism? The Quaker model of support for a person's ministry includes mentorship. Have a stable of people willing to mentor or be a support team.

- How about UU 201 with a strong/better statement of the name? Path to membership and then greater involvement afterward. Create a model of a way to increase volunteerism. Path, with levels of participation.

Could see what regional bodies/groups are doing. Could partner with other Congregations. Look over a range of ideas. Pick out the best.

- Goals for GA. Provide funding.
- Nominating committee pick people delegates to GA?
- Explain GA all year round. Drum up interest. We used to have a denominational affairs comm. 8th principle meetings connect to UUA and GA.
- Need a place for white people to share the pain of addressing and healing from the culture of white supremacy.

The WtC process was reviewed:

Leadership group has been writing the recommendations. Leadership group invites others to take a hand in writing the recommendations. Share with the group in advance of meeting so everyone can read and understand in advance. After the meeting, it will be adopted as a recommendation. Leadership group will find someone to implement, track goal and results via a tracking document.

First we covered theology. Next is governance. Sense is we are ready to move on to next chapter. We will discuss definitive goals at beginning of next mtg.

Check Out Questions: What we do you want to make sure we cover at the next meeting? Are we ready for the next chapter or do we need to spend another month on Governance.

Responses: after 4 or 5 chapters, review goals and priorities as a whole, as an overview.

Bring ideas from this meeting to our committees.

Strong expression of thanks to the leadership group for pulling this all together and hone it down to a usable version.

Move on to the next chapter in WtC “Congregations and Communities” for the next meeting. Please respond to notes and materials before the meeting.

Q and A with Board, June 13th

Next WtC meeting July 7th

Note – the bulleted items are some of the recommendations