

Town Hall – UFL
January 11, 2014
41 Attendees

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: By way of introduction, the Mission and Vision Task Force who's called you all here together, I'm Michelle Iwig-Harmon, I'm on the task force. Other members are John Brewer, Barb Thompson, Jill, Bob Burbank, Suzanna Emelio, and Rebecca Gant and Ted Wilson are also on it, but couldn't be here today, so they send their regards. Our purpose as a task force is charged by the board to help facilitate the conversation to generate our next, our planning for the future mission and vision of the fellowship and congregation of the fellowship, so it's not just us. Our goal is to learn as much as we can from you over the next months to help work toward that goal. You know what, Bob and John, do you mind unstacking some chairs, we've got people still coming in and we need to bring them up closer, if we can. Come on up guys.

We arrived at the town hall concept, which is what we're doing tonight, because we had spent some time reading about mission and vision and about how to explore where we've been in the past. We had the history day, where we came up with those boards. We're talking a lot about where we're going to go in the future, but we also came to the realization that we need to talk about the present some. And so that's what tonight is about and we're planning to have another one in a couple of weeks, and if the conversation needs to go on we'll continue to adjust as we go. But we were realizing that there were a lot of – not a lot – there are some issues bubbling around that would be best brought out into the light so that we can talk more about our hopes and dreams for the future once hopefully some of those are recognizable to more people.

We want to point out that as a task force we are not a decision making body. We are tasked specifically with facilitating the mission and vision. We do not have authority to make decisions, but we do have board members and program council members here tonight and if anything arises that needs to go to them, I hope that you all will speak up and let us know how that could work. Mainly we're here to facilitate conversation, dialogue. The things that we're reading is it's really important in a group like this and in the goals that we have for setting a mission and vision to hear from each other, to listen to what people's concerns and excitements and needs and all of those things are and to see the humanity of each of ourselves and the people around us and that can only happen if we come together and have the conversation. So thank you, welcome everyone for being here.

We are eager as a group to include all voices, so our plan is to, or as many voices as want to participate. Our plan is to take what we do tonight – it's being recorded – and transcribe it and share it with the rest of the congregation so that we can continue the conversation after tonight. So we'll talk more about logistics of that in a few minutes, but we'll go ahead and start with the Chalice lighting.

Suzanna Emelio: "We gather together in this space to honor and understand our lives. We bring our pasts and we'd share them, we bring our dreams and would express them. We use words, song, silence and gesture. Words cannot define our lives, but they enable us to reach out to each other, to tell and to listen, that we may be renewed, connected, unburdened. Apprehend with wonder the lives of those around you, from wonder into wonder, existence opens." *[Lighting chalice]*

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: So the plan is for us to have a microphone that we're going to pass around. We want everyone to use the mic because we want to make sure people can here and that we are recording. We would like to ask that, because we're going to transcribe and there's a lot of voices here that you say your name just before you speak so that we know who's speaking when we do the transcription. If you forget, the moderator may remind you or just say it for you. Our goal too then, is to send this out to the membership. We are going to have another town hall on Wednesday, January 28th

in the evening. We're having Wednesday night dinner. So we're hoping to transcribe this and send it out not this coming week but the next so that it would happen prior to that and hopefully maybe interest some more people or people who weren't able to make it tonight. And we're also eager to include voices who maybe aren't interested in the town hall concept, and so people are open and we'll say that when we send out the transcript to email any of the individuals on the task force or to send us something in writing or whatever works and then those will also be then sent out, so that this conversation is all public and everyone can hear what's going on. At this point that's what we feel like is the best way to keep it moving and to let everyone participate, but if anyone feels like they can't participate in the way we're doing it, we'd sure like hear from them, if there's things that we haven't thought of that we need to accommodate, because we definitely want to do that.

For tonight we're going to take turns as moderators so that we can participate too. And we'd like to ask everyone to kind of think about things in terms of three minutes at a time. There's a lot of people here and we have less than 90 minutes at this point, so we don't have a long agenda for what we should discuss, we want it to come from you. And the questions that we've already sent out are up here, if you need fodder for what to talk about, but I'm guessing we probably have plenty either way.

Most of you have been in groups where we've set covenants and we'd like to do that. It's obviously just for tonight. So I hope that in the interest of time you don't mind that I already took the liberty, we took the liberty as a group to come up with some things and I have them on the board there. If anyone has any questions or comments about them or feels the need to add something, let us know. Our goal really is to allow for open conversation, to have diverse views stated, to let us know what you're thinking, to be open and direct. We encourage everyone to bring up the topics that you want to bring up. We just want to avoid any personal confrontation, anything that is directed at a person. You know, let's talk about topics and ideas and not individuals, that's our goal. And so in that vein, the covenant that I have listed up here, the items are 1) assume good intentions, 2) all viewpoints are equally valid, 3) speak respectfully, 4) speak from one's own experience – in other words, use "I" statements about what you're sharing, and 5) to share the floor. And the moderators will work to help make sure the floor gets shared. That's our goal. Feel free to raise your hand or speak up if we're missing anything.

Obviously all are welcome to speak. If you prefer to listen, listening is good too. It's not going to be a requirement that we go around and pass the mic to every single person, so it's a safe space for that. Anything that I'm missing, the rest of the mission and vision task force? Ok, let's... Does anyone have anything to add to the covenant or are we comfortable with that? Nods would be good or... Ok, thank you. *[clarifying comments about mic]*

Don't everybody raise your hands at once. So the questions that we have up here that we've had in the publicity are – and this was prefaced by we've grown a lot in the last several years. Recently we had a five year plan that we set aside, because we knew we needed to do something a little bit differently. And we've started this process as the next step in intentional planning for the future of the fellowship. And the questions related to those are, during that process or in recent years or in whatever respect you want to think of that, what have you lost or gained, what will never be the same for you, what is making you feel excited, and what is making you feel anxious. You can add your own questions to that list, but as we discussed it, those were things that we thought applied to some of the topics that seem to be bubbling around. So we'd love to hear from whoever wants to be first. Did you come to share something? There we go Barbara.

Barbara Schowen: I'll just say that over the past 15 years, what I have gained and I think we may all have gained, is a much greater connection to the UUA, the wider UU community, and much more intentional focus on social action, all of which I think is really good.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Thank you. And feel free to respond to what others say or come up with your own. We tried to set it up in a semi-circle so we can have conversation.

[Silence]

John Brewer: Quaker meeting. [Laughter]

Carol Eades Delnevo: Well, since once of the options is what makes you excited about the fellowship, the first thing that popped into my mind, and then Barbara beat me to it, is the deepening connection with the larger movement. Not just the UUA, but the now, the region and our participation last year and the conference in Topeka. And just this morning having a guest minister who's almost local. That was really exciting and I felt really proud of us, with her in the pulpit and just the flow of our service, just to see it from a slightly different perspective, thinking about, well, how does she see it. So I thought that was really exciting. There's a lot more to say, but I'll stop.

Valerie Roper: Not sure where I'm beginning, not sure where it'll end, but somebody stop me. Just thinking over several years, thinking how this morning we had both the program with John Brewer's presentation that was really thought provoking, there were discussions going on around the room after that was over and how it dovetailed in some ways with the professional minister in the 11 o'clock service as well. Thinking of the music that's been added to this fellowship over the years and the great contributions and the growth that we've seen in people's talents along the way. The I-70 choir, the opportunity to see UU ordinations and installations along the way. So many things to help people. The growth of our education, adult education as well as religious education for the children, and where we've gone... and seeing recently how we are pulling together as a community to help in some of the pastoral care situations that we're going through now. And what those things bring us to reflect on, which are some of the deep questions of religion. Anyway, I'll quit now.

Tom Miller: I was thinking about some of the controversy about how we restructured. Suddenly the 11 was at 9:30 and so forth. And stretching back into my own experience, I'm a baby, if you were, of the First Baptist Church that used to be at 8th and Kentucky and is now out on Kasold. We had a Sunday school for adult and children for the first hour, then we had an 11 o'clock service and as far as I can remember "childcare" and that was, yeah it killed the majority of the Sunday morning, but we were there for the whole thing. And less than two years ago I ran into someone who said, no, I didn't get out of church soon enough. It had nothing to do with the way I was set up. There are churches that go into session at 8 or 9 in the morning and are still hard at it at 3 in the afternoon. So for all of us who are complaining about, I don't, this is too much time out here, that's a real wide range in there. So I understand the controversy, but clearly it's been possible for some of us human beings to adapt. What I don't remember is whether we're doing Sunday school for the kids during the 9:30 or we're doing it during the 11. Duh.

Jill Jarvis: Maybe this is the time to say what's really on my mind. So I guess almost three years ago we had the round of dialogue circles, where a whole lot of you and lot of other people participated in dialogue circles with no agenda on the table, just how are we doing, what could we do better, what would you like to see changed, if anything. And the committee on shared ministry facilitated the dialogue circles, they went on for several months, we reported the results to everybody. And after that what was decided was we needed to build more multi-generational community, we would like to have the children in worship, at least the older children, we didn't know the age group yet and that we want to have on Sunday morning adult religious education options. With that in mind, we found 9 UU

congregations that had on Sunday morning the children in worship, and so RE not during worship time, adult RE, a service and a forum – and a forum in most UU churches is what our program is, the same format. So members of the committee on shared ministry and I sat down with a questionnaire and we called all these churches and we found out about their schedule, what to do, what not to do, problem areas. At the end of that time, the COSM made a recommendation to the board unanimously, board accepted it unanimously that Sunday morning would look like this, I think, 10 o'clock – child RE, adult RE, and program. No break, but 10 minutes to everybody to transfer in, come together into worship and then worship from 11-noon, some kind of option for the younger children to go out to an activity hour. And that's what we were going with, but at the last minute it got changed somehow so that we have half an hour now in between the program and the service. And we had been specifically warned, don't do that or this whole plan won't work, people will leave. And now we don't have anything after worship for visitors and so, to come together as a community. So when I look at Sunday morning now, I see big problems. Worship attendance is way, way, it's half what it should be in any UU congregation as a percentage of our adult members. And attendance at RE is falling. It's hard to recruit teachers, etc. So Sunday morning is, I've been calling it behind the scenes Obamacare, because we took this really great plan we had really, really studied, and then gutted parts of it that were really significant, so now it's not doing anything like we want it to and that is my concern.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: I'll just point out too, some people are standing, some people are sitting and that's fine, you can choose which way you want to respond out loud.

Bob Burbank: Jill's comment just raised a question that I would like to put out there. From my point of view, whenever you make a change in a program or in a system, it's a good idea to take a look at it after it's been in effect and see whether it's working. So I guess a question that I'd like to throw out for everybody is, is it working? I mean, is it effective in terms of kids, in terms of adult education, in terms of the timing. You know, for me, I mean, we don't have kids, we don't have any conflict, so I think I can say that for me, I don't have any conflicts, I don't know that Martha does either, but I'd like to just throw that out to the floor. Is the current program working or is there some desire to revisit how we're doing things on Sunday morning.

Graham Kreicker: I was unfortunately gone on the 9th of November when the team presented here, but I've had an opportunity to listen to the CD 3 times and what I remember most is a women who moved here from Topeka and said how disappointed she was that there wasn't Sunday school during the worship service and that never would have dawned on me that anybody had any concern about that whatsoever, but she really spoke from the heart and I think it's something we have to pay attention to. Thank you.

Emily Russell: Well, having been watching this since 1967, I think it's working for the most part. We had always put the coffee hour or half-hour as the central focus of the fellowship. That was the time when everybody came together whether they were interested in the program type thing or the worship service type thing, they could all come together over coffee. And that to me is why we keep that in the center, this is the central event. Now I understand that Jill and some other people feel that the worship service is the central event, but many other people feel that the 9:30 program is the central event, so how can.... To me, it seems that this is working the way it is now.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: One brief reminder is that we want to speak from our own experience, so if there is something that you have to say about it, do so, but let's don't say what other people think about, if that makes sense.

Tom Miller: I've attended several different churches and fellowships, and one of the churches that I attended had a regular worship service and simultaneously had that forum or whatever call it, it's a large round circle and it's highly informal. It wasn't a formal program, but it met at the exact same time as the church service – this is a church up in Toledo, Ohio. I think we could actually manage that because we've still have the Founder's hall as well as this, so we could actually run those two kinds of things at the same time. What I don't know and don't remember at all is did they run a Sunday school and then this or what, but I'm wondering about addressing the whole question of how do we pull it together. The model that Jill is talking about, has talked about, is different from what we're doing and the question of success or non-success if we base it on attendance levels, the answer is we're not succeeding, based on membership versus attendance. I went to a church down in Research Triangle Park, it had a problem. They, generally people show up 2 or 3 times out of the month. This place was running at 100+%, they were actually talking about kicking the walls out more than a decade before they had planned to do it because everyone was showing up all the time, so we've got several different kinds of related problems with what's working and what's not working.

Lynne Bodle: This is a good a time as any for me to get on my soapbox. I've been a member since '63, I think, a long time ago. I belong to a fellowship, I don't belong to a church. And it's one of those things that people say it's just semantics, it doesn't matter. It does matter to me. The program part of the fellowship has been central for many, many, many, many years and some of us have been around for a long time and it's extremely important. My big thing is I think it needs, the program is every bit as essential as the worship service. Jill and I have gone around and around about this. The, as Emily says, the coffee time in the middle, people kind of all get together. I would like to see some of the newer people who really don't have a clue about why we older people feel the way we do, I've a whole bunch of pieces of paper from this book that John Brewer has on the fellowship movement. It talks a lot about the fellowship movement, it explains where we this fellowship came from. I think it explains a lot about how we feel and why we feel the way we do, and if anybody wants to look at this to get some feel for why those of us feel so strongly, I've got copies and you're welcome to it. But my big thing is both parts of the morning are important, the people here are important. The people here are why I'm here and I would love to see a way where we could have the program and the worship service and in between RE for both adults and kids. I don't know how to do it. It's been suggested a lot of ways and then people say well, that won't work, so. I don't know, but that would be what I'd like to see.

Suzanna Emelio: I will go as fast as I can, I wasn't going to speak, but I reacted to what Lynne just said. I am a new member and I haven't shared my story with a lot of people, but really fast, I came from very, very, very religious background and then I went through years of very, very , very not anti-religious, but just [*covering face with hand*] like this, closed myself off for many reasons. And artists and intellectuals and humanists were the community of choice for me for much of my adult years and that was all much, most book reading. And at this time in my life, I'm almost 50 years old, and I have found just in the last couple years you guys. And slowly but surely I've come to this awareness, this realization that this conflict, controversy, this pain exists in this community partly over the question of the program and I just want to say as a person that I love the program so much and I love the spiritual celebration so much and I can't always make it physically to both. And I am not at the time where I have young children where I'm concerned about that aspect, so I don't know what the answers are going to be here, but I just want to tell you that one of the things that I've gained and that I value by finding this community is the tremendous humanity and love that exists here and you guys in this room are just a little piece of it, there are lots of people that aren't here. And, thank you.

Nicole Wells: I was going to say a lot of what Suzanna and Lynne said. I enjoy both the program and the service. I've said many times my husband and I have discussed it, that I don't know if I could choose if I had to which one I prefer. I get something out of both, they both nourish a part of me and I think the, like Suzanna said, the central focus of coming here for me is the people, it's what I get from everybody and hopefully I'm able to share something of myself as well. And I can speak to the small children piece which is, it's a conflict for me and this is definitely just my experience. For me, my kids, most of you know them, they're little rug rats, but they don't behave well with free time. And for me personally the problem is between 10:30 and 11, when I am with them and I'm chasing them from one part to the other. It's not enjoyable for me when I'm trying to talk to somebody and somebody has a question for treasurer Nicole Wells and I'm trying to answer it and Nina's running one way and Nick's in the kitchen harassing people and it's hard for me. I love that time though because I understand that that is important for people to have social time and, believe me, I would be social if I didn't have, you know, Nina and Nicolas. Wonderful children, by the way, but. Angels. And that covers a lot of what have I lost. I lost a lot of loneliness and a lot of floating around aimlessly in this world and I gained this and... And I wouldn't trade it because I was missing it for many years. I didn't have that community. So this is, I'm so glad. And I better stop.

Bruce Johanning: Silke and I came, but I'll just speak for myself, because Wolfgang was coming here and we wanted to check you out to make sure that you weren't some kind of wacko group, even though we passed by this place on a regular basis and we really didn't understand what this place was. But we came here, basically showed up on the day they broke ground for the new addition – how many years ago that was, I don't know. But one thing I really, really like about the fellowship is the choice between the program and the religious section. And I'm more of a program type person. But occasionally we'll look, and Silke and I will discuss it, I want to go to the 11 or I want to go to the 9:30, sometimes we'll go to both. And I like the 30 minute break because you can recharge yourself or if you have to talk to someone like Nicole, you have that time or to buy scrip or something else. So I, myself, I like the current structure where you have a choice between the 9:30 program and the religious. So that's just me, and whatever.

Silke Johanning: I think both things are really important. The program is important and the service is important and they grew over time into little bit different, but it is really important. I don't want, I would not advise to play one against the other. And people – and oh, the attendance – I don't, I mean, I know it is frustrating if people put something together and not many people show up. But I don't think the attendance itself says something that... I mean, it should not be the one criteria if the things are working or not, because people have, we have the problem in the moment, for instance, Wednesday evening not so many people showing up, which is frustrating for the people who cook or want to put a class on. But people are busy, super busy here. Everybody has million of things going on simultaneously. So if people don't come, it doesn't necessarily mean they don't like it, whatever, maybe just competing interest or what. But I think really, the good thing is variety of, between program and religious service, sometimes people go to both, how they feel or have time or are in the mood and they bring different viewpoints, and this is important, I think. Thank you.

Paul Enos: I'll put this in the context of what makes you anxious, to me the idea that there's a conflict between the program and the spiritual celebration makes me anxious because personally I don't see a conflict. I mean, I started coming sometime in the 80s and of course it was just program then and I really liked it, liked the interaction with people and then I think the spiritual celebration added a huge dimension and let us reach a much broader spectrum of people. And the idea of having, I think this is why we did it, I was on COSM at the time, decided to have the coffee between is that's the time when

the two groups overlap. A lot of people stay through for both, but in a lot of cases that's the only time you get to talk to people that come just to the program or just to the service. So I don't know how we address the problem of attendance, but I really would like to see the coffee stay in the middle. And one of the things I specifically remember when we adopted this program was in the heading I think, that this is an experiment and we will look at it in several years, and I think that's what we're doing now.

Denise Perpich: This is more about just the RE in general. Back when we had RE during the service, part of the thinking was it was too short of a time to effectively do any RE with the kids, it was only roughly 20 minutes. Thinking well, and recruitment of teachers. While moving RE to 9:30 really hasn't helped that much with the recruitment of teachers, you know, and so that's just something to think about. How are we going to manage having teachers, we're trying to get the middle youth going, which is another set of class and keeping the attendance up so the kids develop a cohort, just along with that. I don't know what the answer is, it's a great group of kids, a great group of teachers, certainly Barb and Bonnie and so many people are doing so many things. Unrelated, what makes me anxious is just, of course, making sure we can retain all of our staff and pay them what a fair wage is according to UU guidelines. I think there's just a lot of work that Jennifer especially does that a lot of people don't know about and Jill and Bonnie, so, that's that.

Sara Vancil: Brian and I joined the fellowship in May and I think our first visit here, one of our first visits here was the program when Dick Schowen gave his kind of like life story, which I thought was so interesting and like amazing, I'm here and I'm kind of in a church and I'm hearing about this interesting man's life. And so that was amazing and I really enjoyed it, but one of the reasons we started here was our daughter, who's five, almost five, and trying to get her an experience of something to supplement the kind of lessons that we're trying to give her at home. And like many people who've spoken, I love the program and I love the spiritual celebration. I do find it very challenging to be here for as long as it takes to be here in a Sunday morning with a 4 ½ year old. And ours is fairly well contained and well behaved, and even so, it's really challenging. So I wonder if there's something that can be done to be more efficient with our time for the two events. You know, they're both an hour right now, and sometimes I feel like either the program or the spiritual celebration can be a little hodge podge, a little jump from one thing to another and I wonder about shortening them, having them both be 45 minutes and just tightening up the focus of each session, I don't know. At least for the 4 year old, I think an hour of RE is a long time. They end up doing a lot of more activity kind of stuff, at the end, which is great, but then she's expected to go back in and do more kind of coloring and activities during the spiritual celebration and it's just a lot for her and she doesn't quite know that there's a difference, I think. So yeah, I would just encourage looking at keeping the formats the same, but maybe trying to be more efficient with the time.

Jake Kipp: I like both the program, having chaired it for awhile and I like the spiritual celebration. I think we have to sort of look at this a little bit more broadly, because we're talking about it's just Sunday morning. In fact, what the worship service is about is it's when our minister meets the congregation. And there's a whole lot of other things that we do in terms of ministry that there has to be that kind of contact to go on. Maybe it's because I'm the age I am, maybe it's because of some problems that I have, but I find the idea that we can help those who have problems as a church a really, really important thing, and that which facilitates the ability of our minister to do that, to me, I see as very important. So that's the only way we do it. But I think it is... It was one of the reasons why we got a minister, not just to have the service, but to in fact to minister to us as a congregation, old and young and in all the aspects that are in fact make it a congregational life. And so that I think is an element that it's got to be part of our equation.

Brian Vancil: I promise to give it to Dick Schowen after this. I, like my wife, I would like to kind of see a little bit shorter program or schedule for the two events. But I would like to know what, for those long time members, what does this time with coffee and where you're meeting people, what does it mean to you. What kinds of conversations do you have, what effect does it have on you, what kinds of interactions take place, what makes it so great and how could we kind of work that into the program and the spiritual celebration so that they fill that role for you. And I think if we knew that, we could be more flexible about the kinds of solutions we come up with. Thanks.

Dick Schowen: This is a sort of a footnote to what Jake said. I do think we're concentrating very much on the two events on Sunday morning, but actually in the last few years this place has produced a florescence of other activities that people are involved in, and I have the suspicion that part of the attendance problem on Sunday morning is just that people are wondering how much UU they can take in a given week. I also have the feeling that this is in a state of dynamic flux at the moment. Bonnie was kind enough to give me a rundown on attendance in the Sunday school and it seems to me there's a steep curve of change going on in attendance. And maybe since this task force will be at work for some time it would be good to just observe what people are doing with their time in a more general sense that is not just, do they go to the program, do they go to the spiritual service, but – and I may say that like several people who thought of myself as, I thought of myself as a program sort of guy, but in fact, I don't know how we got started going to the spiritual service, but – oh it was Jill, I think that caused all the trouble – but to my enormous surprise, I think I'm saying the same thing Paul said too, to my enormous surprise I find that I enjoy it very much. Anyway, I think the whole, the scope of all the activities that's going on is so great that I think maybe the attendance needs to be seen as representing a competition among all of them and the question is how can that be regulated or changed as desired.

Shannon VanLandingham: I was just thinking about this earlier before Dick brought this up, but a lot of congregations are now recognizing that what the church as a whole is doing is not all focused on Sunday morning anymore and they are counting their attendance for everything. So chalice circles, demonstrations, any time that people actually get together as a congregation or as a part of the congregation, but as like we as UFL show up to do something together, the women's group, the men's group, they're counting that overall in their attendance and that gives a much broader and more complete picture of what attendance actually is. So that's an interesting thing to think about.

Tom Miller: Would you believe I actually came here to listen? I want to mass together two or three different threads and ask the following question. When we were a program only morning, I remember it theoretically starting at 11 o'clock and not always getting off on time. So we came together at what, 10:30? Actually started out at 10, ok. Now there's a method to my madness here. In marketing they call it segmentation of the delivery of service, and I'm wondering, here's one proposal, we revert to our previous scheduling but we run simultaneous sessions and you pick which one you want and we do the Sunday school at the same time. Since apparently we're not getting any better with the Sunday school, if we mash them all into the same single hour, you come in, you flip the switch and away you go. If we have the same meeting and formal structure when before we kick off. We now have the physical facility to actually do this, we didn't really, it really wasn't comfortable to meet in the basement while they were meeting upstairs, but we now actually have a facility, we could actually do that. We could revert to a full blown fellowship in the founders' hall and do the church service and do the Sunday school.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Ok, I'm just going to moderate for a second. I think these are great ideas. I want to remind us that tonight is not about solving one particular issue, but about bringing lots of issues to

the table. So if there are new things to add or about Sunday morning, feel free to do that. But I wanted to remind people to try to stick to your experience, what it means to you, how you feel about it, how it's working for your family versus continuing to try to solve that. That'll be a different topic time. This is more, let's keep bringing things out that we want to talk about about how we feel about things and about how it works for you and your family.

Jill Jarvis: I want to give my experience as a minister and I want to lead you all onto the balcony for a second, so the balcony view, the big picture from my perspective. So when I started here I was a consultant minister, which means you hired me to do certain things. And then you called me as your settled minister, and as I said at that November 9th program, there was some work that we didn't do around that. The work that we didn't do around that is what's the difference. So there's a, all this talk about different schedules and programs, there's a much bigger question here, which is who are we culturally. And I could and hopefully will some day, but right now I'm not going to go on and on about this. I am only going to say this, to have a settled minister you really have to be a church. Now that to me means, I mean UU church, that to me means you see yourself as a religious community, you have a minister to be your religious leader, and the worship service is the gathering. You also have other things. And I want to remind everybody if you don't know this, you probably don't, but the first day almost I came in here as consulting minister I met with what was then the program committee. And somebody said to me, I guess that since we now have a worship service and a minister that the program will just go away, and I was, I think, appropriately horrified. I mean, it had never occurred to me that anybody thought that. It had never occurred to me that there was some opposition here. And I said honestly, no, of course not, and, you know, if there wasn't already a program, we should start one, because it's hard to start a program, it's hard to have that kind of format and have experience putting it together with issues that speak to the members and to the larger community, so why would anybody even think of doing that? I say that now because people putting it in opposition hear me say, worship should be the center of community and want to hear – or don't want to hear – but they do hear, that means getting rid of the program. No, it has nothing to do with that, but we don't have two services on Sunday morning. We have a worship service and we have a program. If we had two services, then they would both be my responsibility because I am supposed to be responsible for all of worship. We have a lay led tradition, the program is a lay led tradition and we need to keep it that. But if we don't have a sense of coming together, worship is not another something that you look at and say, well, am I interested in that theme today, should I go, should I not, and it's not to come hear me talk, although as your minister that's how I speak to the entire congregation on a regular basis so we can all hear the same message together. That's why it's important. But we're here for each other. Worship is the people's work, everybody coming together, all ages, all different preferences and styles to be together in their diversity, even though that Sunday it may not speak to you, even though that might not be your favorite style. Everybody has their own thing that they prefer. Worship's supposed to be where we all come together. And so the challenge I ask everybody is do you still want to be basically a lay led fellowship, sort of non-religious, sort of religious, pick one according to your individual choice and have somebody come in and give a sermon now and then. Is that what you want or do you want to be a UU church with a minister and tell that to all those people out there, all those future and present, Unitarian universalists of which there are many apparently in Lawrence that we need to serve or do you want to serve them. I think that's the larger issue that we need to be discussing, we need to be thinking about that, but please, as we talk about things, think, which road do you want to take, because we can't take both of them.

Brita Matiatos Calnon: Jill was saying what was on my mind and for me personally, I want to be a UU church with a minister, that is how I personally feel. I wanted to focus on some of the questions up there as to what I've gained. I feel like I've gained amazing friendships. This place means everything to me and

my family, as Nicole had mentioned earlier. But what I'll say, what I'm feeling anxious about, are the connections that my own daughter is feeling. I want her to feel a connection to the UUA on a much larger scale than I think she is getting. I found it interesting that many of you had said that you felt a connection to the organization as a whole. I'm not feeling that at all. I look back on my experience in the previous church I had gone to and I have said this to a few of my close friends that I felt much more of a connection to the organization as a whole. And it's maybe because I haven't been out there to many other UU churches across the country and at this point I don't have the opportunity to do that. But I don't even feel like we're getting a connection with the other UU churches in our state. The one time that I did was in Topeka and I got to know some other Unitarians and that was wonderful. But I just don't feel that we are having that connection. I feel like it's all us here and not out there. And I'll say that I am anxious about that because I want my daughter to feel a connection to the organization. I want her to stay in this, I think it's a wonderful thing. And she loves it here, but I want as she gets older to feel that connection with other UU churches, feel that she can go to any UU church in this country. And I just don't feel like I personally can even do that. So I'd like to also stop on what or mention what Dick Schowen mentioned before that, how much UU can you get too. Well, as I was looking at my calendar this week and going over it with Paul and when he has to be home early, I had noticed that 5 of my 7 days this week were dedicated to stuff at UFL. And there may be that feeling among other people, they may be like, well I've got this, I'm on this committee and I'm on this committee and we have meetings this week and Sunday rolls around and they're like, you know, I'm just worn out. And I wonder if we have too many committees and some people that are serving on several of them and they're just getting exhausted.

Carol Enos: This is sort of going back to the question that Tom brought up. I have a real problem with having both services simultaneously because very often we look at the programs and we think, we want to go to both. And it's hard to make a choice when they both are very appealing. So I would have a lot of trouble with that. And as far as the half hour in between the services, I value that as much as anything else because that's the time when you can really talk to people, make friends, you can talk over what you just heard, you get to know what their personal problems are, or what their joys are and that part is extremely important to me. I would not like to do away with it.

Bonnie Blosser: I'm your director of lifelong learning, but I'm also a mom of three children and when I think about religious education here, I think about going back to being a mom to my 3 children and teaching them to read, because I worked with them on reading before they got to school. And I thought, I don't want my children to just know how to read a book. I can teach them phonics and I can teach them how to read. But what I wanted to do with my children was instill in them just this deep passion for reading and this love for reading. When I saw my 6 year old walk around with a chapter book on his way to the bathroom with his nose in a book, you know, not willing to put that down, I knew I had done it for him. And when I saw my middle daughter voraciously plow through those boxcar children books, I knew I had done it for her. I want to ask you, what do you want me to do as your DLL in RE, do you want me to teach them how to read or do you want me to teach them how to be passionate UUs? Because they can come into the space on Sunday morning for an hour and we can throw them a little UU identity information, we can teach them a little bit about UUs, but do you really want them to grow up and be a UU. Do you want them to feel that passion and feel it inside of them. I'm hoping, I'm hoping, that's what I would like to do with them, just like I wanted to teach my children to be passionate about reading, I want to teach these children that come here to be passionate UUs. I can't do that, our teachers can't do that in one hour a week. And that sense of community that you all feel out here, when the kids come darting through the doors and they're all excited to be here and then they come into the room and they don't see their friends here, that just breaks my heart, it really breaks my heart. Because your

community is here, their community is in that room and when their friends aren't coming, it's just, it breaks my heart to see them go through the morning without their friends. That's the only time they have with these friends, their UU friends. So I don't know, I wasn't here when the questions were made but do you want your children to learn how to read UU or be passionate UUs?

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Nicely said Bonnie. The multi-generational aspect of our community is something that's really important to our family and to me. And I think having been really involved in the RE and trying to help keep balls in the air when we were between Sherry as a DRE and Bonnie as a DLL it opened my eyes to a lot of what was going on. In terms of how that could actually work logically, but also just more emotionally. I have to say as an RE teacher I like the longer time frame, especially with the older children, because it works well to give them a chance to bond with each other and have a chance to have a cohort. It gives us more time to do things that they like to do and for me attendance here is about are we offering things that people like to do. Do they make the choice to come over other options that they have in their life. And we're busy also, definitely. And I think for our family, like most families probably, but our family we make the choice on a case by case basis. But overall we want our children to be here, we want them to be part of this community, we want them to feel like there's a larger support group network or whatever of people who share their values and share their desire to make the world a better place and give them the opportunity to do that, and that's a big part of why we started coming and why we still come. And I think the challenge for our family as we become more involved in different aspects, the challenge for our family on Sunday morning comes most often on holidays and special events, because it becomes more – and maybe I saw this more because I was trying to help coordinate it – but when it becomes that both communal events, the program and the service would like to include the children, which is admirable, it becomes challenging for families because children, my children, are not made to sit through two hour long events no matter how much fun stuff we include in them. And so it forces us to choose, do we come to one or the other, do we skip altogether, do we just power through. And my children are older now, our children are older now, so it's easier for us than it was. They're 9 and 13, if you don't know, but now we're seeing, well, more push back, this is boring or I don't want to do this. And you all had raised your own children, you know that's coming in the teen years. But I would like to see things here that they want to come for, and what they want to come for is to be with their friends, and they want to have their time in the RE wing with their friends and what we want them here for is to see a communal gathering, where they learn the rhythms and traditions of what it means to be UU, and that's what you give them. And I hope that that's what they take with them as they go out into life that will help them return to it in the future whenever they make their own choice of what they want to do in the world. And I guess for me, the multigenerational aspect is more than just what little pieces here and there do we do, but do we live this as a community, do we decide together what works for people of all ages and how do we include it in as much of what we do as we can, and I think it has to be an intentional choice that we want to include them and we need to study how developmentally it works for kids that are 4 and kids that are 8 and kids that are 13 and people who are in college and people who are adults with young children or older children, I mean, we have to look at the gamut of what works and what people want to come do together. And for our family it would be really helpful if we spent some intentional action in that way.

Suzanna Emelio: I just feel the need to voice something and it's my personal anxiety – what is making you anxious – I think the only real thing that's making me anxious in all this is just the idea that... Even though I get it, I totally get it in my head and in my heart, the idea and concept of making this place a one central activity centered, the only thing that scares me and concerns me about that is, if the program is alive and well and thriving, and yet the spiritual celebration is considered and viewed as a central activity, those people who come mainly or only to the program would, that they would be

devalued in some way. Nobody – I don't think – would stop that activity. If we had a central activity and it was the spiritual celebration, I don't think anybody would stop people from just coming to the program and going home, but my anxiety is that somehow that would be devalued.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: I'm just going to moderate again for a second, we have about 20 minutes left, it's about 10 after 5. We're going to have a dinner at 5:30 and we are going to try to wrap up on time, so if, feel free for this discussion to keep going, although if you haven't spoken yet and you would like to, we're down to 20 minutes, so if you've already spoken, maybe take a little break and let's see if some of the folks that haven't yet and would like to can, and feel free to bring up new topics.

Mary Beth Musick: I have a question, our corporate name is Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence and are we in arrears for changing our name, are we going to change our name to Unitarian Universalist Church of Lawrence or what's the process and the time frame for doing that or are we just not going to do it?

John Brewer: I don't have an answer to that [*laughter*]. I do have a continuation of the concern that Suzanna expressed. The concern that somehow one activity such as the program, which we could call a gathering if we don't want to call it a service, is being symbolically marginalized I think is disturbing to people. Supposing we had a policy that said no other group would be allowed to meet concurrently with the program. Suppose we had a policy that said only the spiritual cele-, excuse me, the worship service can print color order of service but not the program, suppose we said only the minister can have a permit parking out here but not our guest speaker who might have to drive in from Topeka or Kansas City. I'm not saying that any of those things are true, but if they were it might feel like somebody was being marginalized and that could understandably generate a certain amount of resentment and anxiety.

Nancy Jorn: I was just going to follow up on what Suzanne said, because I think I am one of those people that would feel marginalized if the program is undermined or further undermined, because I made a choice a long time ago to leave the traditional church service behind, it just, I was done with it. And when we moved into a more, you know, having the option of a traditional church service here I attended for quite awhile and I found I'm still done with it. I just, I don't like it. And so I'm perfectly happy to have it and I know it means a lot to many people, but it doesn't speak to me and what makes me anxious is that I'm going to lose what does speak to me here.

Daniel Bontempo: I hear everything people are saying about Sunday morning and I'm not going to add to that, I think the issues are out there and time is a tremendous challenge. I would make it longer because I think the coffee hour is, I always wince at the word hour because it's not an hour and by the time I get out of one room, say hello to somebody or stop to fill up a cup of coffee and get upstairs, somebody's ringing a chime over my shoulder. I don't get to get into those conversations. I mean, you'd have to be very lucky to actually get to a table, sit down and exchange a few sentences, much less mull anything over or learn what someone else's mind is. And so, yeah, don't get rid of it, but it's not working as a half an hour with the first five minutes and the last five minutes as a kind of scramble. And the other, what I've, for the questions, you know, I really gained when I first came here. I liked the idea of adult RE. I was not a church going or practicing religious type person, but whether it was philosophy or psychology of human experience or just thoughtful questions about moral aspects of life, I was, people in the beginning would say, oh yeah, there are some UU theology people, they'll talk and talk about that. I was like where are they, what are they talking about, because you know that sounded interesting to me and I was trying to find out what UU was and I heard UU and theology put not in the same sentence but next to each other and I'm like, yeah, what is that. But we don't really have any adult RE right now.

The team leader's vacant, the Wednesday night issue, I don't know if it's part and parcel of the adult RE, people have mentioned trying to put it on Sunday, but maybe, I don't know, but I think that's an issue. There's, that development of adult persons, it's not happening and I think it's a problem.

Graham Kreiker: You don't have to guess what I'm going to say, my anxiety is that we're not going to fully respond when the pledge drive comes up in February. We're not going to increase our pledges by 18.7% and then we'll be in a real pickle, that's my anxiety.

Jennifer Donnelly: So I'm sitting here thinking, the fellowship has been an interesting place for me because I came here because of a job, but then it really became a cool place for Mike and I, who have both experienced organized religion and don't want to in a lot of ways from where we both individually were. So when we found the fellowship I think for both of us it was an interesting place in our life because it was a place we could both come and we aren't going to find that place I don't think otherwise, so. You're going to correct me if I'm wrong. Yes. So that's kind of, so the fellowship, and by the way I'm also really realizing that I'm totally outside of the experience of the fellowship calling a minister, because I wasn't here during that time. It happened before I came, and so I think what we kind of see the fellowship as, we haven't had that experience of a fellowship calling a minister and we don't understand all of that. Nor do I think we probably, the fellowship I think, just Jennifer thinks the fellowship's fulfilling the needs of this huge diverse umbrella, and so we all have our own experiences. The interesting thing for us, I think, is the spiritual celebration is a good place for our family. We don't necessarily do the program. We love the people of the program, so. But it's not always where we're going to be on Sunday morning, so which will also bring me to really quick snippet of, Sunday morning and the change of the schedule has been a bit of a challenge for us, because we're not going to come at 9:30 and probably go to the program. So, and that's just based on our family and what, meeting our own needs, so. The other – I have one more snippet and I'm glad this is being recorded, so. And that is, I'm anxious about the fellowship also taking a look at those people that are coming but not continuing and how can we have some conversation with those people and try and figure out... Because I also think as an organized group and community, I think we're all here because we are invested and we want to be here tonight, but then what else are we missing so we can continue the outreach that we can do, so there you go.

Carol Eades Delnevo: I want to speak to two areas where I have gained a lot in, for myself. And I don't speak for myself very often so it's a nice opportunity to be able to do that. The first one is, I came from a Unitarian universalist church in California where we had two worship services that were the same, just at different times. And coming to the Unitarian Fellowship, I came around the time that we started to have a minister, and so we had what has now become a worship service and the program. In the conversations that I've been a part of, I've never heard even heard a suggestion that the program would go away in any way. But for myself it was a great enhancement of Unitarian universalism to have two, to have a program that I could go to. I was used to going to worship service, so add that into the mix for me was important but I could see from the outside that it makes for a really dynamic congregation and you know the back and forth that we have about the worship service, the program, this sort of false division I think in a lot of ways, it's an opportunity to have a lot of back and forth and to have a diversity of opinions and it enlivens the whole place, I think. So that's one way that I think that I've gained. The other way that I've gained, and I think that we all stand to gain as Unitarian universalists, is for the experience that our children have here. Now I'm speaking as a mother for two children who are now teenagers and spend a lot of time being reluctant about coming to the UU, as we've always called it, and kind of struggling through their childhood to keep them connected here. And for me it's deeply gratifying and encouraging for the future that one of my kids has become connected here and I give

credit to many people who have invested themselves, you know, invested the passion that they have in working with children, but also to the transition to including children and youth in the worship service. There have been many people on the worship service team that have reached out to my son and asked him to do this or asked him to do that and the whole environment of this place has become welcoming to him where he's completely independent of me. I have no involvement in his engagement here. He is engaged, you know. And as gratifying as that is for a parent, a committed UU parent, it speaks to the future of our movement, if we can find those ways to not just think about ourselves, but to think well what is it like for a kid, what is it like for a teenager, how can we hook them, because that is the future of Unitarian universalism.

Ellen Reid Gold: Well, first of all I just want to say to Nicole that your children will grow up. And I also appreciate Suzanne's comments on marginalizing the program and also those of John Brewer, because I think in pursuit of a unified worship service to some of us who have been here a long time, it does sound as if the program were being put second and also the fact that no committee meetings or groups are supposed to meet at 11 and there is RE during the 9 o'clock program and there's also been some OWL meetings, etc., etc., etc. that does look like inequality to me and marginalization. On the other hand, I do like having the service around. I think it has greatly increased both my appreciation and the appreciation of many people in the fellowship. It's not as if I've always, have ever thought that the service was an intruder, it's just been to me an addition to some programs to which I'm very committed.

Susan Cooper: Thank you for allowing me to sit and listen for most of this conversation today. I feel like I've really gotten a greater understanding of some people's thoughts and pain and fears and hopes and dreams. And especially because I don't have children that are involved, it's good for me to hear what are some of the concerns and some of the good things around that. I think that one of the things I would like to contribute is I really appreciate a positive comment or two towards solutions and I know that, I'm recognizing that this is not the time for solutions, but it indicates a desire to have a solution rather than like it or leave it. And honestly, I've kind of heard that undertone in my personal interaction with some people. You know, you can always leave. And that ruffles my feathers because I care enough to be here and I want to stay, but I also want to be heard, so I appreciate this opportunity to be heard. I don't have a solution, but I really like the idea that we're talking about things that cause us great pain. One of the things that causes me great pain is when I'm over-tasked and I don't get a chance to actually talk to you as a person, whether it's during our coffee half hour or whether it's before service, that causes me a lot of pain because that's why I'm here. One of the things that causes me a lot of joy is when I actually sit out there at a table or in a chair and I can like wave and talk to people who pass by or whatever, that's why I'm here.

Bruce Johanning: I'm anxious about one thing, I guess, anxiety or something else, that is sometimes here at the fellowship I feel like in a room full of cats and somebody has a laser pointer. Anyway, sometimes. What I'm talking about is a lot of times we come up with a lot of problems that we have and before we can ever come up with a solution, we get distracted from the question which we had. It's the same thing when we have, right now, people complain, Wednesday night, attendance is falling off. Why is it falling off? I believe a lot of us are getting distracted because there's just so many things going on right now that we have, the men's group, the numbers are plummeting, I don't know about the women's group because I've never attended.

Voice: You're welcome!

Bruce Johanning: Thank you. I'm welcome I didn't attend or...? But it's just like, Silke and I have talked, if we attended everything, we would be exhausted. And that's kind of one of my anxieties. We need to sit down and at last concentrate on some things that are important to the fellowship, and to the people instead of trying to come up and have, and occupy all of the time we have. The concept of the spiritual celebration or whatever you call it, the worship service or whatever and also the other service, I think that's really a minor because people are always going to choose one or the other and I think it's a great system. And we sometimes go to one, sometime the other, sometimes to both. And sometimes I actively avoid one or the other. But it's just, I think we are being distracted from the real problem sometimes.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Ok we're down to just a couple of minutes, but I know Douglas had his hand up and then I'm going to close up.

Douglas Underwood: I started going to a fellowship – I think they still call themselves a fellowship, although they'd been a church for a long time in Corvallis, Oregon. And they always had, I'm not even sure if it was a service or a worship service, sometimes it was one or the other, I suppose. They always had a question and answer even after a sermon, like five or ten minutes usually. That's one thing I miss. Myself, I feel connected to, I feel that – I don't want to say connected, I think the psychologists would put it in quotes and it's not really a feeling – I feel like if I went to a different town one of the first things I'd want to do is attend the Unitarian church or fellowship there, even as a visitor, or certainly if I moved there. So I think I do have a feeling and a connection to the national movement of Unitarians. I don't know what lifelong Unitarian means sometimes when I read it. I know I didn't feel part of the Baptist church I grew up in even in grade school. I know I was a Unitarian in high school for certain, even though I didn't know about it specifically. I went to KU and I never heard about this place out here. I didn't really discover it until like 10 years later when I was about through with graduate school for awhile. Anyway, that's some of the things I wanted to talk about.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Lynne wants to have one last comment.

Lynne Bodle: Three. Very short. Three historical comments. I have five children who grew up here. Three of them are Unitarian, one of them goes to Unity and I have no clue what the other one is, if she's any. I know she struggled mightily in 9th grade to come up with a Unitarian prayer at baccalaureate at Central. There have been way before Jill various efforts to start a spiritual celebration of sorts and I remember one when Jeff Lewis was doing it and I said, fine, you'll be lucky if you get 12 people. Look where we are now. And the other one – oh, Sunday school. From time immemorial in this place and I suspect every place else one of the biggest problems is having consistent attendance by the kids, so if we can figure that one out, good luck.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Ok, so we're out of time. We have a nice soup that Bob has made for us that we hope you'll all stay for. And we had talked about how are we going to wrap this up at the end and we hadn't really come to a conclusion. But I think something that Bruce said prompted for me, what are the bigger questions. And everything that was said tonight is obviously important to you, to others in the fellowship, to us. All of us are we in this room and I wish we could solve them all. And I think it would be great if we continue the conversation and talk about more of them and move on to some of the bigger questions, and I think, in my opinion, that's what the mission and vision task force is about, is how do we collect what matters to so many people and articulate it in where we want to go. And I don't know if that's exactly where we're headed, we're still kind of learning as we go, but in my opinion that might be where we're headed. And so continue sharing with us what you care about and what matters and what

we can do together and what we can be to the world, because that's really what we're after in the long run, I think, on our task force. So we hope you'll come to our next gathering or encourage others who haven't been able to be here to do so. If you find that you have comments that this has brought up for you later, feel free to email them to any of us on the task force and we'll add them to the collective knowledge as we're moving forward. So join us now, if you will, for a short meal. Thank you.

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