

Final Report of the Transition Team

Unitarian Universalist Church of Meadville

May 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The work of the Transition Team (TT) over the past two years is described in the attached timeline and appendix. In its conversations, the TT found general agreement among the congregation that a part-time minister—either a half-time contract minister or a minister shared with other area churches—makes most sense for UU Meadville for at least the next few years. We also determined that the current relationships among area UU churches are probably not sufficiently strong to support a shared ministry. Given this context and the fact that Rev. Robin is already contracted on a part-time basis for the 2017-18 church year, the TT has identified two viable options for 2018-19 Church year:

Option 1—Extend Rev. Robin’s contract for a third year and create a Partnership Team (separate from the Board) to support the development of partnerships with area churches.

Option 2—Engage a half-time contract minister (other than Rev. Robin) with a one-year renewable contract.

With both options, the Church would continue to be served by a part-time minister who would lead approximately 20 services per year, supervise paid staff, and provide executive leadership by supervising paid Church staff and by helping the Church organize teams to support essential Church functions (worship, RE for children and adults, community events, church administration).

Assuming Rev. Robin is available to serve in this capacity, the Transition Team recommends the Board pursue extending her contract for a third year, which has the advantage of meaning the Church could devote energy to building a network of support among area UUs. If we elect to engage a different half-time minister, it is likely that any Church energy not devoted to ongoing day-to-day tasks over the next year will be consumed by the search process and welcoming a new minister.

A Caveat

Although Church members did express a consensus view that a part-time ministry makes most sense for UU Meadville at this juncture in our history, they also expressed some concerns. In particular, members were concerned about whether we have the capacity to continue providing high-quality worship services without the support of a full-time minister. Members indicated that they appreciated the diversity of our current service offerings but wondered whether there was sufficient energy to continue with our current model. With this in mind, they offered several suggestions for relieving the burden: more actively seek opportunities to exchange service leadership with area churches, reach out to UU lay ministers in our area to see if there interest in leading one or more services for us, determine if there are any Meadville UUs who would be interested in becoming a UU lay minister and support their training if there is interest, continue to utilize outside worship leaders who are aligned with UU traditions. Concerns were also expressed about supporting ministerial functions like pastoral visits and adult RE, particularly UU 101. It was noted, however, that our current team approach to supporting these functions seemed to be working.

DETAILS ON EACH OPTION

Option 1: Extend Robin's contract for a third year and create a Partnership Team (separate from the Board) to support the development of partnerships with area churches.

If the Board elects to pursue Option 1, the TT recommends the Board identify a Partnership Team (separate from the Board) that would be charged with developing stronger relationships among area UUs. Since the work of the Partnership Team will extend the work of the Transition Team, we believe that there should be some overlap in membership between the two groups and that there would be significant advantages to broaden the membership to include Church members who were not involved with the Transition Team.

The Partnership Team's work might include the following tasks:

1. Help members of the Meadville UU expand our understanding of partnership to include all area UUs. The local UU presence is larger than just the Erie and Meadville churches. There are other churches and fellowships within an hour of Meadville, (Girard, Ginger Hill, Chatauqua, Fredonia, Youngstown), and the leadership of several of these churches have already expressed interest in developing broader connections among UUs in the region.
2. Meet with the Erie church leadership (and the leadership of other area UU churches) this summer to talk about options. In particular, determine if they have Partnership Teams with which we might work collaboratively.
3. Develop ways for members of area UU churches to learn about one another's activities. For example,
 - a. Ask the church leaders to distribute information to their members describing how to get on the email distribution lists or mailing list of area UU churches.
 - b. Ask each church to update their web sites to include links to area UU churches.
4. Seek other ways to help members at each church know what is going on at other churches.
5. Consider organizing car pools from Meadville to bring members to activities at other area UU churches.
6. Work with the district/regional UUA leadership to develop a UU cluster in NW PA.
7. In collaboration with regional UUA leadership and area churches, explore options for shared ministry. Models for shared leadership include
 - a. A person with 2 or more part-time contracts with no coordination among the churches
 - b. A yoked ministry where there is a formal agreement and high-levels of collaboration between two or more churches
 - c. Any number of permutations of these two extremes.

Option 2: Search for a half-time contract minister with a one-year renewable contract.

If the Board elects to pursue this option, the next step would be forming a search committee. In the search, the TT recommends that the focus of search should be on finding part-time ministerial leadership that would support executive function for the church in addition to the typical worship, pastoral, and RE services. As noted above, electing option 2 would mean that the Church's energy would necessarily be focused inward on the search process and welcoming a new minister. The TT does not expect there would be enough capacity within the Church to also pursue deeper partnership with area churches while completing this search.

TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS

- Rick Holmgren
 - Melissa Mansfield (beginning in February 2017)
 - Laurie Parendes
 - John Stewart
 - Rachel Weir (through January 2017)
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TRANSITION PROCESS: TIMELINE and SUMMARY OF WORK

(Also see Appendix for more details: meeting notes, Oracle articles, etc.)

Fall 2015: Start-up retreat, facilitated by Evin Carvel-Zeimer. With Board and Interim Minister, Rev Pam Allen-Thompson. Discussed Transition phase and responsibilities of Board and Transition Team.

January 2016: Transition Team met with Board and also had a separate organizational meeting.

Transition Team charged with addressing the following questions:

- **Who have we been?** Coming to terms with congregational history- taking a clear look at current and past conflicts, including the reactions to losing a minister.
- **Who are we?** Claiming our strengths, who are we now, including economic challenges, and how can the shared awareness of identity help us move forward?
- **How are we?** Develop clear appropriate governance and leadership structures including the role of paid staff and opening doors for new involvement.
- **With whom are we connected?** Strengthening connections with the broader UUA movement and other structures.
- **Who will we be?** Strengthening stewardship, making a commitment to leadership, including a new minister, and enthusiastic participation in future.

February and March 2016: Transition Team meetings to discuss strategy for gathering information.

Decision to build on previous work (World Café, Strategic Plan, Pledge Drive discussions, etc) to address charge and move forward so that congregation is prepared for a ministerial search.

April and May 2016: Circle Supper and Lunchtime discussion: 3 Themes + guided discussion prompts

- Transition
- What we know so far
- We are! We can!

Summer 2016: Search for part-time Interim Minister; Rev Robin Landerman Zucker hired

August 2016: Transition Team met with Board and Rev Robin: initial discussions / plans

Fall 2016: Start-up workshop, with Board, Transition Team, Rev Robin. Regular Transition Team meetings to re-develop strategy for transition work, with Rev Robin's guidance.

November 2016 to April 2017: Thinking it Through with the Transition Team: Monthly discussion topics:

- November 2016: What are three things about the church / congregation that you would celebrate?

- December 2016: What are three moments that you found to be of difficulty or concern in your personal experience with the Church?

- January and February 2017: Our vision for the next minister at UU Meadville
 - What is your response to the Transition Team's proposed focus for our next minister? Do you have any suggestions for shaping the focus?
 - We can search for a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Each of these options has its pros and cons. What seems most appropriate for our Church at this time? Why?

- March 2017: No TT discussion
 - Congregation members invited to contact Transition Team members individually to provide comments/input on any discussion topics and/or the ongoing transition process

- April 2017: Follow up to Multi-site Ministry Workshop:
 - How might we build a network to support our ongoing work? For example: Cluster concept being promoted by the UUA.
 - Do we want to partner with another church (or churches) to share a minister or ministry?
 - What might we gain from a partnership?
 - What concerns do we have about joining in partnership with other churches?
 - What might we have to give up or change if we are to partner with other churches to share ministry?

March 2017: Transition Team and Board members attended the Multi-site Ministry Workshop, facilitated by Rev Joan Van Becelaere (UUA). Rev Renee Ruchotzke (UUA's Central East Region) and Members of area congregations also attended.

May 2017: Final report prepared with recommendations to the Board

APPENDIX: TRANSITION TEAM SUMMARY OF WORK AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

CHARGE TO TRANSITION TEAM

(Excerpted from Deb Lehman's Agenda for our January 2, 2016, meeting with the Church Board.)

Thank you for your commitment to work together to move our congregation forward during the interim period. As you learned at the Start-up Retreat, facilitated by Evin Carvel-Zeimer, the Transition Team will begin a discernment process with the congregation in preparation for forming a ministerial Search Committee. There is much work to do, given the usual timeline of a 2 year interim period we should be prepared to launch a search in June 2016.

The first task of the Transition Team and Board will be to begin gathering information for the Interim Progress Appraisal, which can be found on the UUA web site under Transitions Office heading. Copies will be provided at the meeting. The report is due by the end of February and I find the questions asked for the appraisal inform the Transition process.

The larger TT task is to help the congregation complete the developmental work of the Interim Period answering the questions:

- **Who have we been?** Coming to terms with congregational history- taking a clear look at current and past conflicts, including the reactions to losing a minister.
- **Who are we?** Claiming our strengths, who are we now, including economic challenges, and how can the shared awareness of identity help us move forward?
- **How are we?** Develop clear appropriate governance and leadership structures including the role of paid staff and opening doors for new involvement.
- **With whom are we connected?** Strengthening connections with the broader UUA movement and other structures.
- **Who will we be?** Strengthening stewardship, making a commitment to leadership, including a new minister, and enthusiastic participation in future.

The last two questions open the door for further exploration of our relationship with the Erie church. Beyond the developmental tasks we also should consider - do we want to remain yoked with the Erie congregation? What resources and ideas can we share that would enrich both congregations?

TRANSITION TEAM MEETING AGENDA: JANUARY 24, 2016

1. Establish regular meeting times
2. Work through the questions on the Interim Appraisal form to get a sense of what we need to do to prepare to fill this out. In particular, we might want to decide for which questions we believe we should be responsible, which we will ask the Board to complete, and which we think we need to do together.
3. In its [charge](#) to the Transition Team, the Church Board asked us to consider five questions
 - a. *Who have we been?* Coming to terms with congregational history- taking a clear look at current and past conflicts, including the reactions to losing a minister.
 - b. *Who are we?* Claiming our strengths, who are we now, including economic challenges, and how can the shared awareness of identity help us move forward?
 - c. *How are we?* Develop clear appropriate governance and leadership structures including the role of paid staff and opening doors for new involvement.
 - d. *With whom are we connected?* Strengthening connections with the broader UUA movement and other structures.
 - e. *Who will we be?* Strengthening stewardship, making a commitment to leadership, including a new minister, and enthusiastic participation in future.
4. The two tasks--the interim appraisal and answering these questions--appear to be interconnected. In particular, we might find it useful to discuss how we want to assist the congregation with
 - a. engaging and acknowledging its grief and conflicts (question 13 on the interim appraisal)
 - b. recognizing its unique identity and its strengths (q. 14)
 - c. recognizing its needs and challenges (q. 15)
 - d. identifying who we want to be as and what we want from a Church community
 - e. understanding how we want to be engaged as a Church in the wider world e.g. service to others, social justice, anti-oppression (q. 19)
 - f. understanding the appropriate structure and role of the minister(s), church staff, and lay leaders given our answers to the above question (q. 16)
 - g. deciding how we want to engage with other area Churches, the UUA, Regional or District Resources, etc. (q. 18)
5. Drafting a note for the Oracle, due tomorrow, January 25.

TRANSITION TEAM

JANUARY 2016 ORACLE ARTICLE

The Church Board has created a “Transition Team” to help the congregation navigate through this time of change. Laurie Parendes, Rachel Weir, John Stewart, Rich Chafey, Rick Holmgren, and Rev. Pam serve on the team. Following suggestions from the Board, the staff of the Ohio-Meadville District, and Rev. Pam, the Team will focus on three tasks:

1. Our shared stories are important forces shaping our community. In recognition of that, we will offer opportunities for members to reflect on our history, the stories and lore that have guided the Church’s development over the past decades, and the impact of Carmen’s ministry and departure.
2. The Church membership has done a lot of work over the past several years to identify our challenges, goals, mission, and vision, and the Team will use that work and the reflections on our history to identify appropriate structures to support the Church’s next steps.
3. Looking outward, the Team will recommend ways we can strengthen connections with the broader UU movement and other groups in ways that will support both our Church and its members as well as the broader movement.

The Team is just forming and so the details of our work are still taking shape. We will share more information as we move forward.

CIRCLE SUPPER and SUNDAY LUNCHEON: DISCUSSION GUIDE

APRIL and MAY 2016

I. Theme: *Transition*

- A. **Background:** The past year has been a time of change in our Church, first with Carmen’s resignation, followed by the arrival and unexpectedly early resignation of Pam. We now find ourselves in a period of ministerial transition, with some uncertainty of “what’s next”. It is not uncommon for churches in similar transition periods to go through “*Healing*” and “*Turning*” phases And it is not uncommon for this transition process to take 2 years.
 1. In the “*Healing*” phase, a congregation addresses any unresolved issues, such as grief surrounding the loss of ministers and other tender issues that require further processing. The “*Healing*” phase may be dominant in the first year of a transition.
 2. In the “*Turning*” phase, a congregation re-focuses outward, toward mission and purpose. The “*Turning*” phase may become dominant in the second year of a transition, once any needed “*Healing*” has been attended to.

B. Discussion prompts:

1. Where are you personally with regard to "*Healing*"? Do you have church-related concerns or issues that need to be heard, addressed, or resolved?
2. Where are we as a congregation with regard to "*Healing*"? Does the congregation have unresolved issues that need to be heard, addressed, or resolved?
3. What, if anything, is needed to facilitate spiritual "*Healing*" at this point in our Church's history?

II. Theme: *What We Know So Far*

A. The Transition Team is charged with facilitating our Church's transition process, and one aspect of that work is to explore some fundamental questions, such as "*Who have we been?*" and "*Who are we now?*" Quite a lot of work has already been done recently that can help address those questions, including World Café events, our most recent Pledge Drive ("*Sustaining Beloved Community*"), and the Strategic Planning Committee [report](#) (2015). Although slightly different in focus, all of those efforts reveal some common themes: We feel "at home" spiritually in our Church community and enjoy each other's company. The Strategic Planning Committee report included several recommendations that, to date, have not been widely reviewed by the congregation. To summarize, these recommendations are:

1. Support congregation members and programs
2. Let our light shine by being more visible in our community
3. Develop a sustainable financial plan
4. Engage the Church community in shaping our future

B. Discussion prompts:

1. Do you agree with the four Strategic Planning Committee recommendations? If not, what are we missing?
2. The Transition Team has reviewed the Strategic Planning Committee recommendations and feels that right now (over the next year), during our period of transition, our first priority should be to "support congregation members and programs". Do you agree with that assessment? If so, what "best practices" should we continue / re-instate / adopt in order to provide that support? If not, what seems to be an appropriate priority for the next year?

III. Theme: *We Are! We Can!*

A. **Background:** As noted in the previous section, one of the fundamental questions the Transition Team is charged with exploring is "*Who are we now?*" The Transition Team has been discussing how the stories we tell ourselves about "who we are" can help shape our future. A quote from Buddha says this quite eloquently: "*What you think you become. . . . What you imagine you create.*"

Certainly, part of our current story includes quite valid concerns on a variety of big issues, including our financial health, maintaining our properties, and what we want in a future settled ministry. However, if we dig beneath the problems and the uncertainty we currently face, there is an additional story line that emerges, one that suggests that *We Are!* and *We Can!* In that spirit (and leaning on Buddha's wisdom), the Transition Team submits the following as a starting point in answer to the question, "*Who are we now?*"

"We are a vibrant small Church community with rich worship, religious education, music, and fellowship programs."

B. Discussion prompts:

1. What specific examples support the assertion that we are a vibrant Church community?
2. A practice of *Gratitude* is a way of honoring who we are: For which aspects of our Church are you *grateful*?
3. An appreciation of *Abundance* is a way of honoring what we have: In what ways are our Church resources abundant? In what ways are our spiritual needs met by our Church's *Abundance*? Consider your own (individual) as well as our collective (congregational) spiritual needs, and consider a very broad interpretation of *Abundance*.

THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM

NOVEMBER 2016 ORACLE ARTICLE

During this interim period, it is the work of the Transition Team (Rick Holmgren, Laurie Parendes, John Stewart, and Rachel Weir) to guide the congregation as we collectively reflect on our past and envision our future, in preparation for the beginning of a ministerial search next fall. As part of this work, the Transition Team will be hosting informal discussions after Sunday service on the second Sunday of each month, each focused on a different question or prompt connected to this transition period.

The first discussion will take place on Sunday November 13 in the living room of the Parish House from 12:45pm until 1:30pm. In preparation, the Transition Team asks you consider the following question:

What are three things about the Church or congregation that you would celebrate?

THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM – NOVEMBER 2016 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2016 ORACLE ARTICLE

Our congregation is currently in an interim period, with Rev. Robin guiding us towards the beginning of a ministerial search next fall. During this time, it is the work of the Transition Team (Rick Holmgren, Laurie Parendes, John Stewart, and Rachel Weir) to help the congregation to reflect on our past and envision our future. As part of this process, the Transition Team is hosting informal “Thinking it Through with the Transition Team” discussions on the second Sunday of each month, with a follow-up report appearing in the subsequent edition of the Oracle.

Our first discussion took place on Nov. 13 and focused on the following question:

- *What are three things about the Church or congregation that you would celebrate?*

We had a lively and informative discussion in which following important themes rose to the surface:

- We are a welcoming, accepting, open community of people of all ages, backgrounds, and spiritual traditions.
- Our UU values allow us to be a bastion of fairness and justice and a place that supports spiritual growth and healing.
- We have a long historical tradition and Meadville holds an important place in UU history.
- Our worship services are stimulating and thought-provoking, with uplifting music and important traditions such as the Water Service and the Christmas Eve service.
- We are an active community of people willing to step up to fill both leadership positions and important roles during Sunday services.
- We offer many opportunities for social and spiritual connections including the Course in Miracles, Circle Suppers, volunteer work, and various small group ministries.

The positive tone of this year’s pledge drive and the congregation’s receptivity to Robin’s ministry were also noted with gratitude and hope.

We value your input during this process and we invite you to join us for our next discussion which will take place on Sunday December 11 in the living room of the Parish House from 11:45am until 12:30pm. In preparation, the Transition Team asks you consider the following question:
What are three moments that you found to be of difficulty or concern in your personal experience with the Church?

THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM: DECEMBER 2016 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

JANUARY 2017 ORACLE ARTICLE

Members of the Transition Team (Rick Holmgren, Laurie Parendes, John Stewart, and Rachel Weir) are continuing to work with our interim minister, Rev. Robin, who is guiding us to be ready for a ministerial search next fall. As part of this process, the Transition Team is hosting informal “Thinking It Through with the Transition Team” discussions on the second Sunday of each month, with a follow-up report appearing in the subsequent edition of the Oracle. Our first discussion in November focused on what we celebrate about our congregation, and a summary was in the December Oracle. The second discussion was held on December 11th and focused on the following question: *What are three moments that you found to be of difficulty or concern in your personal experience with the Church?*

Many thanks to all the participants for their thoughtful and heartfelt responses to this tender topic. Although the focus was on personal experiences, several common themes emerged:

- There are some ongoing or lingering concerns related to past ministries that are part of our collective history.
- Membership concerns include finding ways to encourage more regular participation / commitment / contributions of time / talent, yet not burning out members who become over-extended.
- A number of concerns focused on our church finances and properties, including issues related to the health of our annual budget and endowment, as well as adequately addressing the short-term and long-term issues related to our Parish House and Sanctuary.
- A need for improved communication was a broad theme that included several topics:
 - Exploring more varied ways to get input from congregation members so that we make good, collective decisions for our future, based on our congregation’s mission / vision. Also, honoring our history, without getting stuck in the past.
 - Need clear instructions and established protocols / procedures for Sunday services and special events so that they run smoothly.
 - Being mindful about how we communicate with each other to avoid triangulation and other unproductive forms of communication. Truly listening and considering others’ feelings and points of view.

The Transition Team and Rev. Robin had a very productive conversation about the sensitive issues and concerns raised by the participants at December’s “Thinking It Through” discussion. Plans for 2017 include workshops and sermon topics that will follow up on the themes outlined above. Stay tuned!

PLEASE ATTEND OUR NEXT DISCUSSION: Sunday, January 8th.

We value your input during this process and we invite you to join us for our next discussion, which will take place on Sunday, January 8, 2017, in the living room of the Parish House from 11:45am until 12:30pm. Check upcoming editions of the B&B for the discussion question for January.

OUR NEXT MINISTER JANUARY 2017

Email Announcement

As part of its “Thinking-it-through-with-the-Transition-Team” monthly meetings, the Transition Team invites congregants to join us in the Parlor in the Parish House after Church on Sunday, January 8, 2017 to discuss our vision for the next minister at UU Meadville.

We will consider two sets of questions:

1. What is your response to the Transition Team’s proposed focus for our next minister? Do you have any suggestions for shaping the focus?
2. We can search for a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Each of these options has its pros and cons. What seems most appropriate for our Church at this time? Why?

Minister Position Focus

Every UU minister has some focus beyond organizing and leading meaningful Sunday morning services, organizing adult RE programs that respond to the church’s needs, and providing pastoral care. The Transition Team believes that providing executive oversight is an appropriate focus for the next minister of UU Meadville. By executive oversight we mean supporting and maintaining effective and transparent administrative processes and function, which includes,

- providing leadership and guidance for paid Church staff;
- developing and supporting “team leaders” for the worship, fellowship, RE, membership, and other functional teams;
- working with the congregation to develop and communicate practices for church functions such as pulpit assistant, usher, coffee hour host, pastoral care, stewardship events, adult RE programs, and fellowship events;
- facilitating effective and direct communication within the Church community;
- supporting appropriate outreach and marketing efforts to our broader community;

Such a focus has become essential at a time when so many of our Church members are already fully engaged in work, family, and other activities outside the Church, which makes it difficult for any individual or group to fill this role without risking burnout or missing important aspects of the work. This focus reflects and responds to the changing nature of our society and the way we organize our lives, and the challenges these changes create for all organizations whose executive function had formerly been filled by volunteers.

Structure of the Position

We can elect to contract with a half-time or three-quarter-time minister or to call a full-time minister. Each of these options has advantages and challenges:

Half-time Minister

We can expect a half-time minister to lead one or two services a month over a 10-month church year, provide some adult RE, and be an effective manager of the Church and its staff. Typically, a half-time minister would be in residence in Meadville for approximately 10 days per month for the ten months of the church year and available by phone, email, or online video chat at other times. This is essentially the current arrangement with Rev. Robin.

Advantages of half-time minister—A half-time minister would be able to provide a solid foundation for the Church’s ongoing function, and our current pledging and budget levels are sufficient to support a half-time minister along with other Church staffing, program, and facilities needs.

Challenges of half-time minister—The Church membership would be called upon to provide leadership for the balance of our Sunday services, some adult RE, and some pastoral care, much as we do now. We (the Church membership) would need to commit to providing these services in an ongoing way if we want to pursue this model. Unless we share a minister with Erie or there is someone with an unusual life situation that makes this possible, we cannot expect a half-time minister to move to the Meadville area, so they would not be part of the Meadville community in the way a full-time called minister would be.

Three-quarter-time Minister

We can expect a three-quarter-time minister to lead two or three services a month over a 10-month church year, provide some adult RE, and be an effective manager of the Church and its staff. Typically, a three-quarter-time minister would be in residence in Meadville for approximately 15 days per month for the ten months of the church year and available by phone, email, or online video chat at other times.

Advantages of three-quarter-time minister—A three-quarter-time minister would be able to provide a solid foundation for the Church’s ongoing function, and cover more of the Sunday and Adult RE responsibilities.

Challenges of three-quarter-time minister—The Church membership would be called upon to provide leadership for the balance of our Sunday services, some adult RE, and pastoral care, although not as much as we do now. The membership would also need to increase pledging (or increase efforts in fundraising) by 20-25% to support a three-quarter-time minister along with other Church staffing, program, and facilities needs. We (the Church membership) would need to commit to providing these services and increased pledges or more effort in fundraising in an ongoing way if we want to pursue the three-quarter-time model. Unless we find someone with an unusual life situation that makes this possible, we cannot expect a three-quarter-time minister to move to the Meadville area, so they would not be part of the Meadville community in the same way a full-time called minister would be.

Full-time Minister

We can expect a full-time minister to lead all but one service a month over a 10-month church year, provide adult RE, and be an effective manager of the Church and its staff. A full-time minister would be “called” to our Church and would be expected to reside in Meadville and be a part of our community. Rev. Carmen and Rev. Kate were full-time called ministers.

Advantages of full-time minister—A full-time minister would provide a solid foundation for the Church’s ongoing function, cover most Sunday and many Adult RE responsibilities, and would be a member of our larger community.

Challenges of full-time minister—The Church membership would be called upon to continue providing leadership and support for our functional teams (e.g., worship, fellowship, RE). The membership would also need to increase pledging (or increase efforts in fundraising) by 40-50% to support a full-time minister along with other Church staffing, program, and facilities needs. We (the Church membership) would need to commit to providing these services and increased pledges or fundraising in an ongoing way if we want to pursue full-time called minister.

THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM: UPDATE ON THE JANUARY 2017 DISCUSSION

FEBRUARY 2017 ORACLE ARTICLE

The Transition Team has hosted three “Thinking it Through” discussions so far, as part of the process to prepare us for a ministerial search next fall. Summaries of the 1st and 2nd discussions were published in the December 2016 and January 2017 Oracles. The 3rd “Thinking it Through” discussion was held on January 8th and participants responded to questions about how we envision our next ministerial position being shaped. There was general agreement with the Transition Team’s proposal that executive function is an important skill set that we want to include in the search for our next minister. This would be in addition to skills that are reasonable to expect of all professional ministers (i.e., organizing and leading meaningful Sunday morning services, organizing adult RE programs that respond to the church’s needs, and providing pastoral care). The full summary of the January “Thinking it Through” discussion was lengthier than seemed appropriate for an Oracle article, so it will be sent separately, via email, to congregation members; please look for that in your email messages in early February!

Also forthcoming via email will be a more detailed discussion prompt for the 4th “Thinking it Through with the Transition Team” discussion, which is scheduled for Sunday, February 12, from 11:45am to 12:30pm. We will continue to develop a shared vision for the next minister at UU Meadville by following up on the January topic. We will deepen our discussion on whether we should search for a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Each of these options has its pros and cons. We are interested in learning what seems most appropriate to you for our Church at this time, and why?

The Transition Team values your input during this process, and we invite you to join us for our next “Thinking it Through” discussion. If you have comments or questions that you want to share and either cannot or do not want to attend one of our monthly gatherings, please contact Rick Holmgren (richard.holmgren@allegheny.edu) or Laurie Parendes (lparendes@gmail.com). They would be happy to set up a time to meet with you individually.

TOPIC: OUR VISION FOR THE NEXT MINISTER AT UU MEADVILLE

(Proposed focus and Pros / Cons of different position options detailed in a separate document)

Discussion questions + Summary of participants' responses**1. What is your response to the Transition Team's proposed focus for our next minister? Do you have any suggestions for shaping the focus?**

- There was general agreement with the Transition Team's proposal that *executive function* is an important skill set that we want to include in the search for our next minister. This would be *in addition to* skills that are reasonable to expect of all professional ministers (i.e., organizing and leading meaningful Sunday morning services, organizing adult RE programs that respond to the church's needs, and providing pastoral care). Key is for us to be explicit about the importance of *executive function* skills in the search process.
- Several related topics were discussed:
 - Use of technology (such as Skype, Zoom Conferencing) can enhance a future minister's capacity to fulfill executive functions. This may be especially important if we decide to hire / call a part-time minister. Rev. Robin has already shown us that this is possible / effective.
 - Including explicit questions and asking for honest feedback during the interview / reference checks part of the search process may help determine candidates' level of knowledge / skills needed to make them effective in fulfilling executive functions in our church.
 - In addition to previous ministerial experience, candidates may have managerial experience from earlier careers (prior to becoming a minister) that could enhance their executive function skills.
 - A probationary period can be established to explicitly review / evaluate executive function performance early in a new ministry with us.
 - Very important to have an active, supportive, engaged Committee on Ministry that regularly meets with a new minister and helps him / her stay on track.... Including successfully fulfilling executive functions that we need.
 - Also need to explore (further) developing assistant staff's executive functions. Jodi already does a lot in this arena, and she / we may benefit from additional training.
- In addition to being clear about a future minister needing strong executive function skills, we also need our search packet to be honest about who we are as a congregation / church.
 - For example: It is not realistic to say we have a major focus on social justice, although it is also true that congregation members are actively involved in social justice issues... but those may be outside of formal church activities.

- We need to be careful about vocabulary / phrases we use to describe ourselves. For example: “*training congregation*” has a specific meaning to ministers (implying there is formal support for training early-career ministers). We want to avoid being unintentionally misleading in our search packet materials.
- Best strategy in search packet: Focus on our current strengths as a congregation and in what direction we see ourselves growing in the future.

2. We can search for a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Each of these options has its pros and cons. What seems most appropriate for our Church at this time? Why?

- Participants seemed clear that we are currently discussing these pros / cons, and not yet making any decisions. Also, continuing to discuss this important topic next month and via other venues / formats seemed to have support.
- Some of the discussion focused on the general financial differences between a ½ vs. ¾ vs. full time minister. More exploration of this is warranted, such as more specific examples of how much individual pledging levels would have to increase for each option (½ vs. ¾ vs. full time).
- Concerns about the budget were expressed: we should not over-extend ourselves.
- Rev. Robin articulated an important point related to our decision about future ministry: The pulpit is a *relational vehicle* for the important relationship between congregation and minister. From a minister’s perspective, at least ½ time is needed for this relationship to develop.
- Distinction was clarified between contract (hired on a year to year basis, usually less than full time) vs. called (“permanent”) ministers.
- Issues related to less than full time (i.e., either ½ or ¾ time):
 - Very important to have realistic expectations.... Of minister And of congregation.
 - A ½ time minister would generally be in the pulpit 2 times / month. Worship team is exploring options of budgeting for 1 additional professional speaker per month. In this scenario, congregation would only need to fill the pulpit ~once a month.
 - There can be value in diverse sermon topics / styles with different guests in the pulpit.
 - Flexibility of less than full time may be attractive to some prospective candidates.
 - We would need to protect minister from over-functioning (i.e., working more hours than being compensated for).
 - If we opt for ½ time, especially important to invest in paid part-time staff to help with functions to keep church operations running smoothly.
 - It may be hard / unrealistic for a ½ or ¾ time minister to re-locate to Meadville. Long-distance travel for a long-term position can be hard.
 - Hard to say if it is realistic that we would to find a good ½ time minister who would have the skill set we need, sufficient additional income, and reasonable living situation (i.e., close enough so that travel to Meadville does not become an issue).
 - ½ time could work if structure is set up well. For example, building on the Team / Project structure that Rev. Robin is helping us develop (vs. old model of permanent committees).
 - ¾ time would increase pool of prospective candidates who would apply.

- Some of the pros / cons of multi-site (yoked) ministries were discussed.
 - Hosting a UUA-facilitated workshop on multi-site (yoked) ministries is being explored. We have not yet heard whether Erie is interested in participating in such a workshop with us.
 - Other models of successful yoked ministry can be explored, such as those in Canada.
 - There may be ministers who already have yoked experience.
 - We may need to share, especially now, a time of economic vulnerability for many communities and congregations. (Also discussed: sharing facilities with another congregation / group).

OUR NEXT MINISTER, VERSION 2 FEBRUARY 2017

Email Announcement: Transition Team update

As part of its “Thinking-it-through-with-the-Transition-Team” monthly meetings, the Transition Team invites congregants to join us in the Parlor in the Parish House after Church on Sunday, February 12, to continue developing a shared vision for the next minister at UU Meadville.

This will be our 4th open monthly meeting. In November and December we asked participants to share experiences that provided reasons to celebrate or prompted concern. Summaries of those discussions were published in the Oracle and can be found [here](#). On January 8, we asked participants to respond to questions about how we envision our next ministerial position being shaped. A summary of the comments at the January 8th meeting is attached, as is a document with a discussion prompt for our February 12 discussion, which we expect to focus on whether we should search for a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Each of these options has its pros and cons. We are interested in learning what seems most appropriate to you for our Church at this time? Why?

If you have comments or questions that you want to share and either cannot or do not want to attend one of our monthly gatherings, please contact Laurie Parendes (lparendes@gmail.com) or Rick Holmgren (richard.holmgren@allegheny.edu). They would be happy to set up a time to meet with you individually.

Discussion Prompt for February 12, 2017

At our January 8, 2017, discussion, there was general agreement with the Transition Team’s proposal that executive function is an important skill set that we want to include in the search for our next minister. This would be in addition to skills that are reasonable to expect of all professional ministers

(i.e., organizing and leading meaningful Sunday morning services, organizing adult RE programs that respond to the church's needs, and providing pastoral care). By executive function we mean supporting and maintaining effective and transparent administrative processes and function, which includes,

- providing leadership and guidance for paid Church staff;
- developing and supporting "team leaders" for the worship, fellowship, RE, membership, and other functional teams;
- working with the congregation to develop and communicate practices for church functions such as pulpit assistant, usher, coffee hour host, pastoral care, stewardship events, adult RE programs, and fellowship events;
- facilitating effective and direct communication within the Church community;
- supporting appropriate outreach and marketing efforts to our broader community;

Unless the discussion participants feel a need to revisit this idea of executive function, we would like to focus the February meeting on the pros and cons of hiring a part-time or full-time minister. In particular, we would like to explore three sets of questions further:

1. What are the pros and cons of engaging a half-time minister? What ongoing commitments (to service with the Church, to pledging, to creating a community) would the congregation need to make if we were to hire a half-time minister as our next minister?
2. What are the pros and cons of engaging a three-quarter-time minister? What ongoing commitments (to service with the Church, to pledging, to creating a community) would the congregation need to make if we were to hire a three-quarter-time minister as our next minister?
3. What are the pros and cons of engaging a full-time minister? What ongoing commitments (to service with the Church, to pledging, to creating a community) would the congregation need to make if we were to hire a full-time minister as our next minister?

Brief summary of the pros and cons of each model were provided in a previous document.

THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM: UPDATE ON THE FEBRUARY 2017 DISCUSSION

MARCH 2017 ORACLE ARTICLE

The Transition Team began hosting monthly “Thinking it Through” discussions in November 2016, as part of the process to prepare us for a ministerial search in Fall 2017. The 4th “Thinking it Through with the Transition Team” discussion was held on February 12th and the topic was a continuation from January: developing a shared vision for the next minister at UU Meadville. Participants briefly revisited - and agreed with -- the Transition Team’s proposal that executive function is an important skill set that we want to include in the search for our next minister. This would be in addition to skills that are reasonable to expect of all professional ministers (i.e., organizing and leading meaningful Sunday morning services, organizing adult RE programs that respond to the church’s needs, and providing pastoral care).

Most of the February discussion focused on three main options for a future ministerial position: a half-time (like Rev. Robin), three-quarter-time, or full-time (like Rev. Carmen) minister. Although the Transition Team is still gathering information in preparation for making a formal recommendation to the Board (in late spring), most participants at these discussions have commented that searching for a half-time minister may be most realistic for our church at this time, given our current levels of pledging and other financial considerations. As outlined in previous documents provided to the congregation by the Transition Team, any option has its pros and cons. At the February discussion, there were a number of thoughtful suggestions on how to make a half-time ministerial position work, including creative scheduling options, and these will continue to be explored. For example, in late March, the Transition Team will be participating with the Board in a UUA workshop on multi-site ministries. This workshop will help us understand the theological and practical considerations of sharing a minister with another church (or churches) in our general region.

The Transition Team will not be hosting a “Thinking it Through” discussion in March and instead will be devoting time this month to the multi-site ministry workshop mentioned above. However, they are continuing to gather input from congregation members and value everyone’s ideas during this process. If you have not attended one of the monthly gatherings and have comments or questions that you want to share, please contact one of the Transition Team members, who would be happy to set up a time to meet with you individually. The Transition Team members are: Rick Holmgren (richard.holmgren@allegheny.edu), Melissa Mansfield (mansfield54@gmail.com), and Laurie Parendes (lparendes@gmail.com). The Transition Team would like to gather all comments related to developing a shared vision for the next minister by March 20 so they can begin the final phase of their work.

The Transition Team plans to host its next “Thinking it Through” discussion in April. Details will be announced at a future time.

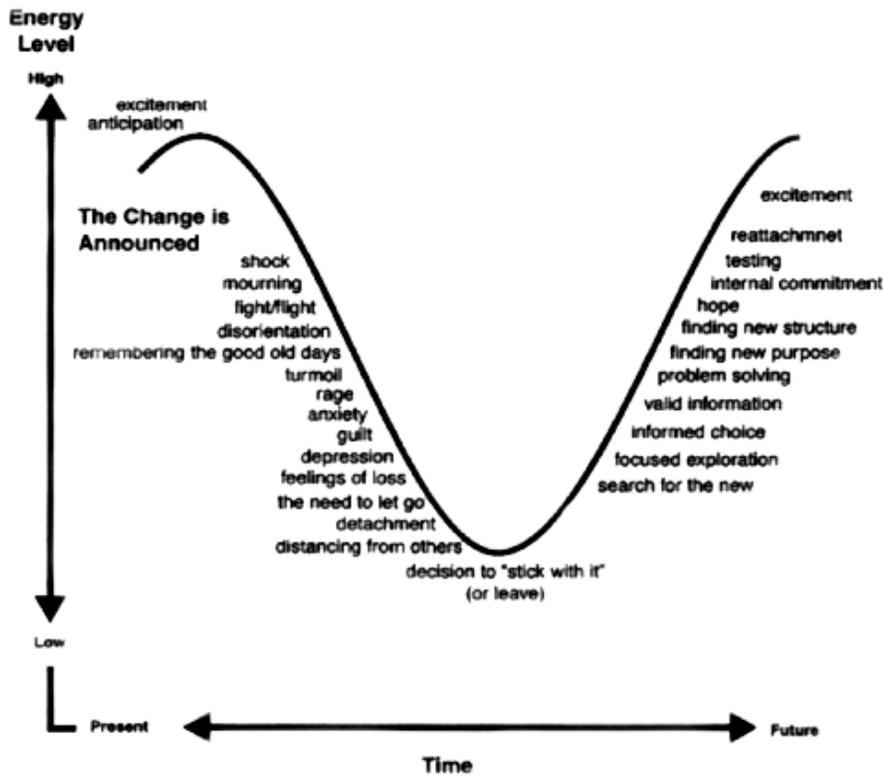
NOTES FROM MULTI-SITE LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP: MARCH 2017

Resources from UUA

- <https://www.uua.org/growth/multisite>
- <http://www.launchpad.faith/>

Roller coaster of change

- As we descend, we deal with feelings. Planning and reason are not only unhelpful but actively resented.
- As we ascend, we have an opportunity need for planning and reason.



Leaders tend to be ahead of the congregation and so start planning before the congregation is ready.

Question for the Team: Where are we (the congregation) on the roller coaster? (Recognizing that not all members will be at the same place.)

Importance of supporting and being supported by a network that is larger than our Church. Successful organizations are going to be networks of networks in an age of “network power.”

Question: Would a worship team shared among some of our regional congregations make sense? It seems at least some of the Ginger Hill (Slippery Rock) congregation might appreciate this.

Best Practices for a UU Cluster

- Meet on regular basis scheduled far in advance
- Meet in person or online
- Create a relationship between the cluster and the UUA regional contact
- Have cluster reps formally chosen by and accountable to congregational boards
- Start with what is possible, even it is small
- Remain in accountable relationships with congregational ministers
- Do stuff together! Fun stuff too!
- Communicate with congregations and each other (Think in terms of five different communication venues and repeating the message seven times.)

Possibility - Share RE and other events

- Erie and Girard each have meditation groups that meet weekly (one is Wednesday the other Monday) and there is connection between these groups.
- What might we share?

Yoked Ministry Best Practices

- Successful yoked ministries that has a very clear covenant determining things like goals of the project; what is being shared; how the minister is evaluated; schedule of assessment for the covenant, shared ministries, etc.

Roles a part-time minister can take

1. Chaplaincy
 - a. Sunday services
 - b. Pastoral care
 - c. Adult RE
2. Coaching membership
3. Ambassador to community
4. Part of a team that covers all the bases

UPDATES FROM THE TRANSITION TEAM

APRIL 2017 ORACLE ARTICLE

The Transition Team is hosting another "*Thinking it through with the Transition Team*" meeting on Sunday, April 9. We have witnessed an emerging consensus that adopting part-time ministry model makes the most sense for the UU Church Meadville at this time, and we invite you to join with us to explore how we might work with other UU churches in our area to support one another in era when none of us have a full-time minister.

MAY 2017 ORACLE ARTICLE

Last month's "*Thinking it Through with the Transition Team*" discussion was rescheduled to Sunday, April 30. As noted in recent B&Bs, we have witnessed an emerging consensus that adopting a part-time ministry model makes the most sense for the UU Church Meadville at this time. The April discussion topic included exploring how we might work with other UU churches in our area to support one another in era when none of us have a full-time minister. A summary of the Transition Team's "*Thinking it Through*" discussion for April will be provided at a later date.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

APRIL 30, 2017 THINKING IT THROUGH WITH THE TRANSITION TEAM

The discussion focused on two topics: (1) how we might build stronger partnerships with area UU churches, and (2) concerns about supporting our Church programs if we continue to have a part-time minister.

It was observed that our relationship with the Erie UU church may not be strong enough and there may not be enough commitment on either side to support a shared minister with Erie at this time. Those observations led to a discussion of how we might build stronger relationships with UUs in our area.

Participants had the following suggestions to begin this work of partnerships:

- Explore the idea of developing a Northwest PA “cluster” of UU churches. Clusters are geographically defined networks of UU churches being promoted by district, regional, and national UUA professionals as a way to help churches support one another and create stronger programs in each church.
- Remember that any relationship starts with small steps, and find smaller, low-risk ways to engage with Erie and other regional churches before embarking on a shared ministry. At the March multi-site workshop, this was noted as analogous to dating before getting married.
- Work with area UU churches to help congregants connect with one another.
 - Ask the church leaders to distribute information to their members describing how to get on the email distribution lists or mailing list of area UU churches.
 - Ask each church to update their web sites to include links to area UU churches.

Concerns were also expressed about whether we had sufficient capacity to continue supporting our programs without a full-time minister. Providing ongoing support for quality worship experiences when we don't have full-time leadership was a particular point of concern. Suggestions to address this included,

- Host a workshop or meeting for people who might want to lead a service to help them begin the work of pulling together a service. Invite congregants who might be interested in leading a service but lack the confidence to do so to attend.
- Sponsor a commissioned lay leader from our congregation if there is anyone interested in pursuing that work.
- Seek ways to exchange services with area churches.
- Be more intentional about connecting with district and regional UU professionals to get help supporting programs. Support congregational engagement in denominational and district events like OMD summer institute and the UUA General Assembly.