

A Gathering of Congregational Leaders

Table Talk Exercises

June 24, Tuesday Afternoon 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.

4:00 – 4:30 p.m. Introductions

Name Congregation and role City and State 1		
Three words you use to identify yourself 2	What is the UU parallel to covering the head out of respect? Or, what do you think we hold in highest regard? 4	What theological identity name do your currently embrace? 5
When have you felt like the “other”? 3		When have you felt truly welcomed as a stranger, what was most significant about that experience? 6

If you use an introduction like this in your congregation you may “unpack” all of the answers in the first of a multi-session class or you may hear the answers to particular questions during the session that relates to that topic -getting to know one another more deeply as your time together progresses.

Today we ask that you share your name, congregation, role AND the answer to the question that was most challenging or the answer that was most surprising to you. Each person has about 2 minutes

4:30 –5:30 p.m. Appreciative Listening to Stories from Another’s Life

In partnership with someone you met today, listen to their stories with a focus on the turning points that shaped them. (15 minutes for each person)

You are invited to listen with these possibilities in heart and mind:

- Listen with holy curiosity for another’s sacred story.
- Listening for appreciation requires concentration.
- Suspend judgment. This is another’s life story. It is not about you.
- Listen for the new meanings you may gather another’s experiences.

When telling a story consider: events that are relevant to our topic. What “borderland type” experiences shape your life and experience?

When have you been in the Borderlands? (avoid tourist experiences)
What do you know/understand now that you did not understand when you first found yourself in the borderlands?

When have you been the immigrant in a new place? How did that feel?
How has this experience informed your understanding of others who are unfamiliar with their surroundings?

When have you experienced true hospitality as a stranger? How did that feel?
What did it inspire in you? What was your relationship with the people or the place?

After you have each shared your stories.

Spend a few minutes designing the perfect sabbatical or retreat for your partner. What would truly refresh and restore your partner? Resist the cultural temptation to expensive and exotic vacation spots. Rather, focus on what is unique and precious in this person and their experience. Try to imagine an experience that will nurture and sustain their special gifts to the world.

Take a few minutes to create a gift certificate that describes this retreat. Present the certificate to your partner with a brief explanation of why you want them to have this opportunity.

Share a few highlights around the table with a focus on:

What new awareness or perspective did you gain?

If you felt especially well heard and appreciated how that feel?

Considering Communitas

June 25, Wednesday Morning 8:30 a.m. -12:00 p.m.

10:45 – 11:30 a.m. Congregational Inventory

15 minutes with individuals to complete the inventory

Re-imagine your congregation as a “redeemed” institution. How would you answer these questions as a member of a redeemed congregation?	
Intentional about its identity and culture,	For what is the congregation known in the community? What are the expectations of membership? How does your congregation nurture the virtues of: modesty, maturity, hospitality, and empathy?
Struggles to name assumptions early and clearly,	Who is not welcome? How do you know? Why would anyone be unwelcome? What is expected? What “labels a person” as new? How many guests do you speak to each week?
Seeks to fulfill its vision by living its mission,	Do you know the vision of your congregation? Do you know the mission of the congregation? When did you first hear about vision and mission? How often is the congregation’s vision of a healed world mentioned on Sunday?
Develops authentic and abiding relationships with other institutions,	With which interfaith, inter-religious or community organization is your congregation in relationship? What borderland activities does your congregation support? With what groups are you in solidarity? On what issues have you born witness personally? On what issues has the congregation born witness?

What are the assets of your congregation as a gathered people of faith?	
What assets do we “own” ?	Resources, habits, people and congregational stories that could build communitas.
What resources are available outside our box?	What practices and disciplines would help us identify our box? What other institutions/congregations/non-profits could you build bridges with?
In what ways to does your congregation consistently resist change?	
What are the stories you tell that make change difficult?	What have you always done this way and cannot imagine changing? What are your sacred cows? What are the values that sustain these “unchangeable practices”?
What new practices can you imagine to sustain change?	
What congregational stories would sustain us during change?	When has the congregation integrated change smoothly and creatively? Identify 3 occasions. What did these situations have in common? How were they different? What can we learn from our success?

Dreaming	Imagine your congregation has no programs at all. In what new and creative ways might you accomplish your mission?
What could you do personally?	In your family, With friends, In your community, In your congregation?
What could you influence in your congregation?	With other leaders, In your structure, With the minister?

Summary:

As you reflect on our conversation and our time together yesterday when we got to know one another on a deeper level what information or ideas:

Surprised you? A few responses

Saddened you? A few responses

Confounded you? A few responses

1. What new ideas or learnings will you share with other leaders in your congregation?

2. Who will you talk to first about this experience and when?

3. What will you say?

4. What will you do to encourage more ministry in the Borderlands?

5. What kind of support do you need to sustain change?

6. How will you get this support?