

Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network Professional Development Day

Adaptive Leadership in a Technical Age (The Idea Most Likely to Keep you Sane in Your Congregational Music Ministry)

Rev. Sue Phillips

July 24, 2013

Do you and your Music Committee/Worship Team/Choir keep addressing the same issues over and over again? Are you tired of disagreements about what hymns to choose and why? Do you spend more time dealing with recurring congregational systems questions than you do preparing to share your music ministry? Take heart! You can help liberate your leadership from the tyranny of tired conflicts and old questions.

This program will help you learn to distinguish between the kinds of issues that have technical solutions and those that are best explored by larger-scale systems thinking. Differentiating between technical problems and adaptive challenges can help free up tremendous energy in you as a musician, in the groups you work with, and in the wider congregational community. It can be the key to an expansive new understanding of spiritual leadership.

Looking together through the lens of the congregational musician, we will:

- explore the differences between technical problems and adaptive challenges in congregations
- identify various types of adaptive challenges and real tools for navigating them
- identify how congregational systems (like committees and staff teams) react to change and disagreement
- recognize the conflicts that accompany meaningful change
- identify spiritual resources for leadership

Presenter Bio

Rev. Sue Phillips is the nearly tone-deaf District Executive of the Clara Barton and Massachusetts Bay Districts, and the Regional Lead for New England. She is an avid student and teacher of adaptive leadership, and filters those concepts through her experience as a lay leader, parish minister, and now UUA staff person. She was one of those parish ministers who always picked the hymns and never gave enough notice about sermon topics but is now really really sorry.

Pre-Event Preparation

1. Reading (Required for MLCP candidates; recommended for other participants)

The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, by Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow (widely available in both hardcover and Kindle edition)

Yes, this is a longish book. Yes, some of it seems focused on a business environment. Adaptive leadership can be helpful if you get the basic concept. It can be revolutionary if you dig deeper. Please read the whole book if you want to go deep.

2. Develop a case study (Required for MLCP candidates and strongly encouraged for other participants)

NOTE: While only MLCP candidates are required to submit their case study, Sue welcomes other participants to send them, as well. Writing out a case study will get you thinking about a specific situation you want to work on during the session; sending it to Sue will get her thinking about the range of challenges faced by musicians in their congregations. (You will not receive specific feedback.)

We will test, explore, and apply our growing understanding of adaptive leadership using case studies from each participant. The presenter will ask you to refer to your case study throughout our time together, and she will use what you submit to inform her presentation's focus and direction.

Choose a challenge you are encountering in your congregation that doesn't seem to be responding to your existing leadership strategies (and/or those of others around you). This may appear to be an intractable challenge that never quite goes away, or one that keeps surfacing despite your best efforts. The most fruitful subjects for this case study will involve groups of people operating in a system rather than a very few people.

Prepare a one-page written case study in which you describe the situation, identify the apparent players in the challenge, and name your place among those players. Briefly explain what solutions you and others have attempted. Do not analyze the solutions – just describe them.

Please submit cases to Rev. Sue Phillips via PDF file attached to e-mail at sphillips@uua.org no later than July 15, 2013.

Post-Event Assignment (Required for MLCP candidates; an optional thought exercise for others)

1. Clarify your existing case study according to the initial directions above, or choose another case that more directly applies given what you have learned about adaptive leadership from your reading and the presentation. (250-500 words)
2. Answer the following questions about your case (750-1000 words)
 - a. Which aspects of the case appear to involve technical issues? Adaptive challenges? How can you tell the difference?

- b. Name three strategies you could use to address the most important adaptive challenges and how you would try to implement those strategies.
- c. As succinctly as you can, name what is at stake for your congregation in addressing the adaptive challenges you named. What could become possible if the challenges were overcome? What might happen if they aren't?

Submit cases to Rev. Sue Phillips via PDF file attached to e-mail at sphillips@uua.org no later than January 15, 2014. No extensions will be allowed.