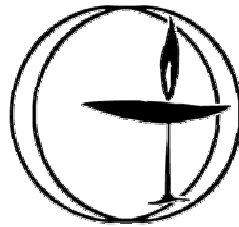


# **Assessing Our Leadership**

## Promoting Effectiveness in Congregational Leadership



June 2001

**Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association**  
**Unitarian Universalist Association Department of Congregational, District**  
**& Extension Services**  
**Unitarian Universalist Association Department of Ministry**  
**Liberal Religious Educators' Association**



# **Assessing Our Leadership**

## **for Professional and Lay Leaders**

### **of Unitarian Universalist Congregations**

*Promoting Effectiveness in Congregational Leadership*

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*This guide is posted on the web at [www.uua.org/ministerialdevelopment](http://www.uua.org/ministerialdevelopment)  
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## I. Overview - Introduction

"Ministry is anything a congregation does in pursuit of its religious mission to its own membership and the wider community."<sup>1</sup> Ministry is the central activity of any religious congregation. Anything so fundamental needs to be assessed regularly and carefully so that the members of a congregation may ensure that they are doing the job they think they are, deepening their understanding of ministry, developing resources for supporting their mission, and setting goals for carrying out that work more effectively.

When we speak of assessing ministry, we mean assessing all the activities that advance the congregation's mission, including, but certainly not limited to, the work of the clergy. Attempting to assess the effectiveness of a single person's work, such as the minister's work, apart from the dynamics and work of the entire institution runs the danger of concluding that everything that is not what it might be must be the fault of the single individual being evaluated. And since it is clear that a congregation's ministry depends on much more than the work of a single individual, it is logical to assume that the assessment of a congregation's ministry must include more territory than the minister's "performance."

Here in this more expansive view of the assessment of ministry, we want to answer the questions:

- *How well are we "walking together" to serve the mission of this congregation?*
- *How do we contribute to the health of this congregation and the larger Unitarian Universalist community?*
- *What can we do better?*
- *How can we improve and grow (spiritually, numerically, and/or financially)?*

Consequently, we suggest a 3- to 5-year cycle for promoting effective leadership and assessing ministry that can help congregations answer these vital questions. The steps in promoting effective leadership include:

1. Developing a common understanding of the mission/vision statement;
2. Defining the roles and responsibilities of professional and lay leadership in relation to the mission/vision;
3. Defining the roles and responsibilities of other staff in relation to the mission/vision;
4. Completing a 3-5 year strategic plan with agreed upon goals that advance the congregation's mission;
5. Setting annual goals that are consistent with the strategic plan;
6. Developing annual individual action plans for all members of the leadership team that are consistent with the annual goals;
7. Assessing the ministry of the congregation in relation to individual action plans, annual goals, the strategic plan and the mission/vision;
8. Participating in appropriate continuing education and amassing resources as identified in the assessment process;
9. Returning to Step 5 unless it's time to return to Step 1. (Return to Step 1 at the end of the current strategic plan — every 3 to 5 years.)

There are two important points to make about this process for promoting effective leadership. First, we are aware that many different instruments and tools already exist or can be developed to

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Robert T. Latham

assess ministry in congregations. You may choose to use something other than the process we outline here (although we would counsel against it given all the thought and planning dedicated to this outline). Second, we recognize differences exist among people and congregations. Therefore, the cyclical process outlined in this guide must be adapted to the local context.

This particular document focuses on the assessment process, which includes Steps 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the process for promoting effective leadership. Materials developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association's *Fulfilling the Promise* team can help you with Steps 1 through 5. A brief description of the three approaches covered in these materials appears in Appendix B of this guide. And, of course, there are many other resources related to developing mission and vision statements, strategic plans and annual goals, both specific to congregations and more general resources for non-profit and for-profit organizations.

### **Who Should Use this Process**

As we worked on this document, we came to understand that congregations decide to perform assessments for a variety of reasons. We recommend the use of the process we have outlined here for congregations who want to

- Encourage the career development of clergy and staff, and training for lay leaders,
- Promote the quality of the congregation's overall ministry,
- Conduct congregational planning that is in touch with members' experience, and/or
- Promote appropriate accountability on the part of the minister or other staff.

We suggest strongly that it would be inappropriate to embark on this type of assessment process if leaders in a congregation wish to

- Address disgruntlement on the part of one or more members,
- Consider a change in ministerial leadership, or
- Find out if members of the congregation have a problem with the minister.

Anytime there are problems occurring in a congregation, the best approach is not to assess or evaluate, but to communicate. Communicate with the minister, involve the Committee on Ministry, the personnel committee and/or the governing board, and, if issues are not resolved at that point, seek help from the district staff.

### **A Few Words about Healthy Congregations**

As we have developed this assessment process, we have made multiple assumptions about what we think healthy congregations "ought" to look like. We wish to make our assumptions explicit by listing them with questions that healthy congregations can answer clearly and positively:

1. The congregation focuses on its mission.
  - What is the congregation's purpose and reason for being?
  - Is there a clear statement defining who we are?
  - To what extent can people in the congregation articulate that mission?
2. The congregation has a "picture" of its future.
  - Where is the passion in the congregation?

- Where is it we are going and how are we going to get there?
  - Does the congregation have a strategic plan to help it move into the future?
3. Roles and responsibilities are clear.
    - What is the organizational structure and how do we operate?
    - What is the role of the Board, committees, ministers and staff?
    - Does authority match responsibility?
    - To what extent is each entity aware of the roles and responsibilities of the other parties?
    - To what extent do all the parties work together to accomplish the mission?
  4. Many members of the congregation are aware of its history.
    - Does the congregation have an understanding of its history and the events and people that have shaped that history?
    - Does it have an understanding of how this history will help or hinder the congregation for moving into the future?
  5. The congregation has a formal process for handling conflict in a healthy way.
    - When conflict occurs, how do we deal with that conflict?
    - Are there systems in place to resolve issues?
    - Does the congregation get bogged down in conflict, or is it able to work through and resolve conflict in a way that is healthy for the organization?
  6. The members of the congregation practice "right relations" in their contacts with each other. Ministry is the art of making and keeping promises to walk together toward wholeness and holiness.
    - To what extent do we have a clear understanding of what we can and have promised to one another?
    - How do we identify the boundaries of good behavior among us?
  7. The members of the congregation understand that they are part of a larger Unitarian Universalist community. Healthy congregations know when and how to ask for help.
    - Is our congregation tied to the larger Unitarian Universalist world?
    - Are we willing to use the resources the Unitarian Universalist Association can make available?

However, just because we have listed characteristics of a healthy congregation does not mean that assessment is only for "healthy" congregations as defined above. Some of the first goals for "next year" might be to move the congregation toward better health.

As you may have noticed, the first three items above are key elements in the process of promoting effective leadership of a congregation and prerequisites for our assessment process.

## **Who We Are and How We Got Here**

This document is the result of a long process involving parish ministers, religious educators, and the staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). It began as a conversation within the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) continuing education committee (CENTER) and among staff members from the UUA's Departments of Ministry and of District, Congregation and Extension Services. All sought to meet the widespread call from congregations for guidance in conducting evaluations.

The project emerged over time and a group called *Task Force on Review and Renewal of Ministry* was gathered under the auspices of the UUA's Department of Ministry. The results of many conversations led to the publication of a draft document, *A Guide to Review and Renewal in Unitarian Universalist Congregations*, in 1998.

After collecting thoughtful critiques of that draft, additional participants were added to the task force to rewrite the document. Additionally, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and the Unitarian Universalist Association agreed to sponsor a gathering of stakeholders representing a much broader range of constituencies of the Unitarian Universalist movement. This gathering took place in California in March 2000. As one of the results of the deliberations of that meeting, where much was discussed, the Task Force redirected its work, resulting in this document.

Throughout its history, the Task Force has always agreed that good assessment processes for congregations and their professional staffs are helpful for the continued growth and vitality of our movement and excellence in our Unitarian Universalist ministry. The disagreements and discussions have come as we have tried to come to terms with what "good" assessment processes actually are. Much of the discussion has centered around the term "ministry."

When we talk about "ministry" here, for the purposes of this assessment process, we are using the term in its broadest sense; that is, the ministry of the entire congregation. It makes sense to assess the ministry from a systems point of view, where ministry is seen as the broad work of the congregation. Obviously, the work of individual clergy, staff, and religious educators fits into this broader picture, as does the work of congregational leaders on the various boards and committees of the congregation.

Since the publication of the 1998 draft, much has occurred within the Unitarian Universalist world towards improving the effectiveness of congregations. In particular, the Unitarian Universalist Association's *Fulfilling the Promise* project has been introduced to the member congregations of the association. Among other things, this program encourages congregations to develop their own unique mission statements and to create action plans that further their missions. While developing this program, the *Fulfilling the Promise* strategic planning team felt the need to develop approaches to congregational assessment.<sup>2</sup>

Our task force agrees with the *Fulfilling the Promise* Committee in recommending that a congregation develop clear statements and understandings of its mission, vision and covenant in

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<sup>2</sup> The *Fulfilling the Promise* team recommends a congregational assessment every three to five years. They offer three differing approaches to that task which are briefly described in Appendix B of this guide. Our work presumes that a congregation has in place the recommendations for a congregational assessment. See *Fulfilling the Promise, Final Report*, June 2001.



order to focus its goals and objectives. With vision, mission, covenant and goals established, then clear definitions of roles and responsibilities can be developed for volunteer and professional leaders. No reasonable or ethically justifiable assessment of the congregation's leadership or ministry is possible until these kinds of objective standards are in place and agreed upon.

Based on this thinking, our Task Force shifted its focus. We agreed that the materials and mechanisms put forth by the *Fulfilling the Promise* team are essential to assessing the leadership and overall ministry of our congregations. It was our challenge to take the work that congregations have already done in "fulfilling their promise" and design tools to help a congregation's leaders assess the ministry of the congregation, including the working relations among leaders and their individual work performance.

We invite you to communicate with us changes that make sense to you as you follow this guide to assess the ministry of your congregation. Please offer us your feedback, insight, and learning. There is a survey form in Appendix C of this guide that we encourage you to use to give us information that can help us to improve this process. Contact us through the Ministerial Development Office in the UUA Department of Ministry.

*The members of the task force and the groups they represent are:*

The Reverend Jay Atkinson, <i>CENTER</i> Committee, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association	The Reverend Tom Disrud, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association
The Reverend Nancy Bowen, District Consultant, Clara Barton District of the Unitarian Universalist Association	The Reverend David Hubner, Department of Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Association
The Reverend Jean Brown, Liberal Religious Educators' Association	The Reverend Kenneth Gordon Hurto, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, and Unitarian Universalist Association
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The Reverend Mark Gallagher, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association	

## II. LEADERSHIP ROLES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Accountability Issues

When we talk about assessing or evaluating the work performance of individuals, we are really talking about making people accountable, monitoring whether they are doing the job we expect them to be doing. In any well-functioning organization, where there is authority being exercised, there is (or should be) a corresponding accountability. For example, elected officials are accountable to their constituencies, employees are accountable to their supervisors, ministers and governing bodies are accountable to their congregations. And, it is appropriate that processes or systems be put in place in organizations to assess accountability.

Because the exercise of authority (also referred to as the use of power) can cause so many problems when role expectations and lines of accountability are unclear, it is essential to the smooth functioning of a congregation that such expectations are outlined and defined before any disputes arise, and certainly before any assessment takes place. This helps keep the focus on programmatic issues rather than on arguments over authority.

In this guide, our concern is the assessment of church leadership as it relates to the ministry of the congregation — are the people "in charge" doing their job? There are many lines of authority in the governance of any congregation, and simply evaluating the minister does little to affect the "system" of governance. Rather, we believe that an assessment of role expectations and lines of accountability in the entire leadership system makes more sense. We begin by considering separately the role expectations and accountabilities of settled ministers and other staff.

### The Unique Role of Settled Ministers

Most people are more familiar with models of governance (the ways that authority is exercised) in non-profit organizations than in our congregations, and more familiar with standard business employment relationships than with the unique covenant between a minister and a congregation. Here are five areas where a civic non-profit organization and a Unitarian Universalist congregation differ in terms of governance,<sup>3</sup> especially related to the role of settled ministers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Given our system of congregational polity, individual congregations may vary from the description given here. This is, however, the norm for our tradition.

<sup>4</sup> We are speaking here of *settled* or *called* ministers. The situation may be different with consulting ministers, extension ministers, interim ministers, associated community ministers, and non-called assistant ministers who might well be appointed by the Board and charged with specific priorities. How to tell if a minister is "settled?" Was there a congregational vote to call the minister? Was there an installation ceremony? These are sure signs of "settlement."

A non-profit organization *hires* employees to do its bidding in exchange for payment. A non-profit determines the time and place and manner and amount of an employee's labor.

*By contrast, a congregation calls a minister to be in a covenanted relationship with it, not to complete a list of specified tasks.*

In a non-profit setting, the employee is likely to have a supervisor with a fairly extensive knowledge of the job and familiarity with the employee's work.

*By contrast, most of the minister's work is unseen and mysterious to most of the congregation. The priorities are anything but clear. Indeed, managing the complex priorities of ministry is one of the main professional challenges of a minister. And there is no one in the organization with broader responsibility or fuller accountability. Further, it is essential to congregational vitality that ministers be empowered to lead and challenge, rather than act as "hirelings."<sup>5</sup>*

Both non-profits and Unitarian Universalist congregations have governing bodies, with broad responsibility to guide the organization toward its mission (Board of Trustees, Board of Directors, Parish Council, etc.). The non-profit Board typically hires a chief executive officer (CEO) and charges that person to hire other staff and carry on the work of the organization. It follows naturally that the Board evaluates the success of the CEO in carrying out that charge.

*By contrast, a settled minister is not hired by the Board. Just as the congregation elects its trustees, it calls its minister. In terms of governance, the settled minister is on the same level of authority as the Board, though there are distinctions regarding their specific areas of leadership. One does not appoint, dismiss, or oversee the other. By contrast, almost all other entities of the congregation (committees, staff, etc.) are under the authority of either the Board or the minister.*

In a non-profit organization, the Board is the definer of the mission and the CEO is the prime implementer.

*By contrast, in Unitarian Universalist congregations, both the Board and the settled minister are definers of the mission in conjunction with the congregation. And both the Board and the minister are involved in its implementation. The roles are less distinct. This may be a challenging governance structure, but it is our tradition.*

In a non-profit organization, the CEO is an employee in the organization. The Board has the responsibility to hire, evaluate and fire the CEO as it sees fit.

*By contrast, a congregation and its settled minister are in a covenantal relationship. They promise to walk together in mutuality. They are accountable to one another. They give their loyalty and trust to one another. It can be helpful for a minister and a Board to develop a written*

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<sup>5</sup> Though the IRS defines a minister as an employee for tax purposes, we surely do not concede to a government agency the right to define our religious tradition or to determine how we relate to our called clergy.

*agreement regarding their respective roles and responsibilities in the congregation. District field staff may be able to facilitate a process of developing such an agreement.*

### **The Roles of Other Staff Members**

In general, staff members in congregations are either hired employees or contractors, under the authority of the Board. The responsibilities for defining job descriptions, hiring, supervision, evaluation, discipline, and termination may or may not be delegated by the Board. If some or all of these responsibilities are delegated, they usually go to the minister or some committee. Congregations vary widely in these arrangements according to their size, their staff structure, the experience of particular staff members, and historical accident.

It is beyond our scope here to attempt to define best practices for the myriad situations found in our congregations. Nonetheless, it is imperative that authority and accountability arrangements be clear and well documented — in personnel policy manuals, in employment contracts, in job descriptions, in letters of agreement, and in some cases, in a congregation's by-laws. Consistency among all these is critical. Both the job description and the employment contract or letter of agreement should be congruent.

These explicit, written agreements regarding authority and accountability in a congregation then become the basis for assessing the congregation's leadership.

### **Accountability of Settled Ministers**

Often, the question of assessing or evaluating the minister arises out of a legitimate concern that ministers be appropriately accountable. There is sometimes anxiety due to the fact that the settled minister has no supervisor. The question of evaluating ministers is complicated further by the fact that ministerial candidates and new ministers *are* formally evaluated by the Unitarian Universalist Association's Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) regarding their suitability for ministry. These reviews have included congregational ratings of ministerial performance in various areas. After three years of successful reviews, a minister is granted "final fellowship," after which there are no further MFC evaluations. By that point, though, both congregation and minister may have become accustomed to this unilateral performance rating process, which is appropriate for the purpose of determining suitability for ministry. But to continue such "performance ratings" as part of a congregation's normal assessment process undermines the covenantal relationship that is so basic to the health of the congregation's ministry.

While settled ministers traditionally have wide latitude in determining the course of their ministry, they do not have *carte blanche*. They are accountable for their actions and the results of their actions. They are expected to be in touch with the congregation's members and leaders and to determine priorities on the basis of mutuality. There should be means by which concerns regarding ministerial activity can be effectively addressed. Ministers are accountable for maintaining professional standards.

Before considering the assessment of the congregation's ministry, it should be noted that there are a variety of routine elements of ministerial accountability already in place.

- The Committee on Ministry There should be a Committee on Ministry to counsel with the minister regarding the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry, to confer on priorities, to provide feedback on congregational matters, and to generally promote the overall ministry of the congregation. In fact, the Committee on Ministry can be the lead agent in formally assessing the congregation's ministry as described in this guide. More is said about this at the end of Section IV, and a more detailed description of a Committee on Ministry can be found in Appendix D.
- Direct Consultation with Members Anyone who has a concern about the minister's activity or role is encouraged to speak directly to the minister. Members of the Committee on Ministry stand ready to support people in doing this if they feel shy or uncomfortable, but it is always in the best interests of the organization when issues or problems are discussed face-to-face rather than through a third party.
- Direct Consultation with the Board and its Committees Most ministerial activity is undertaken in collaboration with some congregational group. There is on-going interplay and feedback. There should be collaboration on goal setting between the Board and the minister. Often the minister gives an annual report; sometimes monthly reports.
- Conflict Management Processes Some congregations have a formal process for managing conflicts not resolved by direct consultation — including disputes with the minister. This process should ensure that everyone with a serious concern gets a fair hearing. There are outside resources available to assist in conflict management. The regional District Executive is usually available for consultation and assistance and can point out other sources of help as well. It is wise to make use of these resources at an early stage in any conflict.
- Collegial Standards The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association has established *Guidelines for the Unitarian Universalist Ministry* and a *Code of Professional Practice* to which ministers hold each other accountable, both informally and through official censure. In addition, ministerial colleagues frequently consult with one another regarding the conduct of their ministries.
- Unitarian Universalist Association Credentialing The UUA, through its Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), conducts a rigorous credentialing process for new ministers to ensure their readiness for our ministry. Newly credentialed ministers receive a preliminary fellowship for at least three years. During this period, they are formally assessed each year. In addition, the MFC has established rules governing ministerial conduct. When there are allegations of ministerial

misconduct, a grievance is filed. After a formal hearing, a minister may face sanctions up to and including the revocation of credentials.

- Negotiated Resignation or Termination Congregational by-laws typically provide for the termination of the ministerial call by formal action on the part of the membership — most often a vote at a congregational meeting. Termination is a measure of last resort. It is likely to have enduring negative consequences for both minister and congregation. Nonetheless a congregation does have this ultimate authority.
- Summary In a covenantal relationship, accountability is mutual. To promote accountability on the part of the congregation there should be an annual process for reviewing the terms of the ministerial Letter of Agreement, including compensation. To promote accountability on the part of the minister, he or she should be included in the annual review of the leadership's goals and action plans as described later in this guide.

### **Accountability of Paid Professional Staff**

Paid professional staff members have several of the same accountabilities as settled ministers. These include direct consultation with members and negotiated resignation or termination. Additionally, paid professional staff members who are also members of LREDA or the Unitarian Universalist Musician's Network or other professional organizations also have collegial standards to live up to, just as ministers are held accountable to UUMA standards. Finally, accountability can be established through other mechanisms, such as:

- direct consultation with whomever has supervisory responsibilities;
- asking for annual, quarterly or monthly reports (written or verbal) to the supervising body, the congregation, the governing board or to a council of committee chairs (program council); or
- conducting a collaborative leadership assessment process that includes reflection on the recent past, individual self-assessment and collaborative goal-setting for the coming year which results in a better understanding of expectations and more accountability (a process like this is described in this guide).

### **Accountability of Lay Leaders (Non-Paid Staff)**

Structures vary widely in our congregations, but it is fair to say that lay leaders derive their authority from the congregation and are therefore accountable to it. The trustees are typically elected and are accountable directly to the congregation. Other leaders are appointed by the trustees and so are accountable to them. This means that lay leaders can be "called to account" for their actions or omissions. This need not take the form of a reprimand, but may consist of advice, questions, or requests. Ultimately, accountability implies that one may be relieved of duty at the discretion of the other, or that one may choose to alter or terminate the relationship. Unfortunately, in practice there is often little accountability for volunteer lay leaders. However, this is more a problem of

organizational will and time availability. Some ways that congregations increase the accountability of lay leaders are by:

- asking for annual, quarterly or monthly reports (written or verbal) to the congregation, the governing board or to a council of committee chairs (program council);
- publishing the names and positions of lay leaders with the invitation to contact them with ideas or concerns;
- having key lay leaders provide advice and counsel to other leading volunteers who are struggling;
- conducting a collaborative leadership assessment process that includes reflection on the recent past, individual self-assessment and collaborative goal-setting for the coming year which results in a better understanding of expectations and more accountability (a process like this is described in this guide).

The point of accountability of lay leaders is not intended to place additional stress on volunteer leaders. A congregational culture in which we can and do raise concerns with one another in constructive ways not only leads to higher quality interactions but also deepens relationships.

### **The Question of Individual Performance Evaluations**

There is heightened interest in our congregations regarding performance evaluations for ministers and other staff. Such procedures are familiar to anyone who has experience in business or non-profit settings. Performance evaluation is a key component of much of professional life.

Performance evaluations may arise from a variety of objectives:

- the desire to maintain accountability,
- the wish to support and encourage professional development,
- an assumption that evaluations must be done, or
- dissatisfaction with a particular person's performance or style.

These are different objectives. Different processes might be applied to deal with them. We should be careful about assuming that a performance evaluation of any single person is the proper way to deal with a particular situation

In recent years, many Unitarian Universalist congregations have struggled to formalize the review of their paid staff, including their minister's performance. Interestingly, as UU congregations struggle to put annual performance evaluation procedures in place, some business and organizational management experts are recognizing their limitations and modifying their appraisals.

Here are some major criticisms of annual performance evaluation:

- It is difficult to specify really useful and objective criteria for evaluation.
- They misdirect work priorities toward whatever is measured, while difficult-to-measure activities may actually be more important.
- The evaluation process itself diverts staff time away from more productive activities.
- They often have an adverse effect on morale and performance immediately after the evaluation, which only gradually returns to baseline levels.

Peter Drucker, one of the leading organizational management gurus, goes further. He warns, *"the traditional performance evaluation is absolutely incompatible with the basic integrity of the work place. Coming out of abnormal psychology, it looks for weakness, for disease, and it assumes a short-lived relationship"* (Quoted in *Interchange*, Winter, 1988).

It can be helpful to look at what is trying to be accomplished and the actual outcomes that have been achieved — and using the insights gained to set fresh directions and priorities. Standard employee evaluations are but one way to do so.

One other issue that many people link with performance evaluation is compensation. This is another area in which business and organizational management experts have been critical. Here we agree with the latest opinions that changes in compensation should *not* be based primarily on performance evaluation, but on:

- cost of living adjustments,
- Unitarian Universalist Association compensation guidelines,
- compensation practices at comparable institutions,
- changes in responsibility,
- career advancement, and
- changes in the congregation's financial situation.

This is true for ministers, professional leaders and other paid support staff.

Consequently, we recommend the process for promoting effective leaders and assessing the ministry of the congregation as described in this guide as the proper context within which to assess the individual effectiveness of the congregation's lay and professional leaders. Of course, it may still be desirable and necessary to conduct individual performance evaluations, particularly of paid support staff who may not be part of the Leadership Team that participated in the assessment. But at that point we would recommend using a very similar process to the assessment process outlined here, with the development of action plans that are aligned with the congregation's goals, with comparison of the stated goals with the past year's work, and development of a future action plan, including a review of resources or training that might be needed for success. (See the following section for a full description of the assessment process.)



### III. THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Since we have chosen to define ministry in this guide as "anything a congregation does in pursuit of its religious mission to its own membership and the wider community," we believe that anything so fundamental needs to be reviewed regularly and carefully so that a congregation may ensure that it is attending to its ministry, deepening its understanding of ministry, developing resources for supporting its mission, and setting goals for carrying out that work more effectively.

We hope that all congregations enter into the process of assessment based upon a wish to deepen their relationships — between clergy and laity as well as among laity — and to strengthen their collaborative work. Therefore, we suggest an assessment process that creates a climate in a congregation that encourages the best possible use of the gifts of its members and offers opportunities to strengthen those gifts with the ongoing support of continuing education — again for laity and clergy alike.

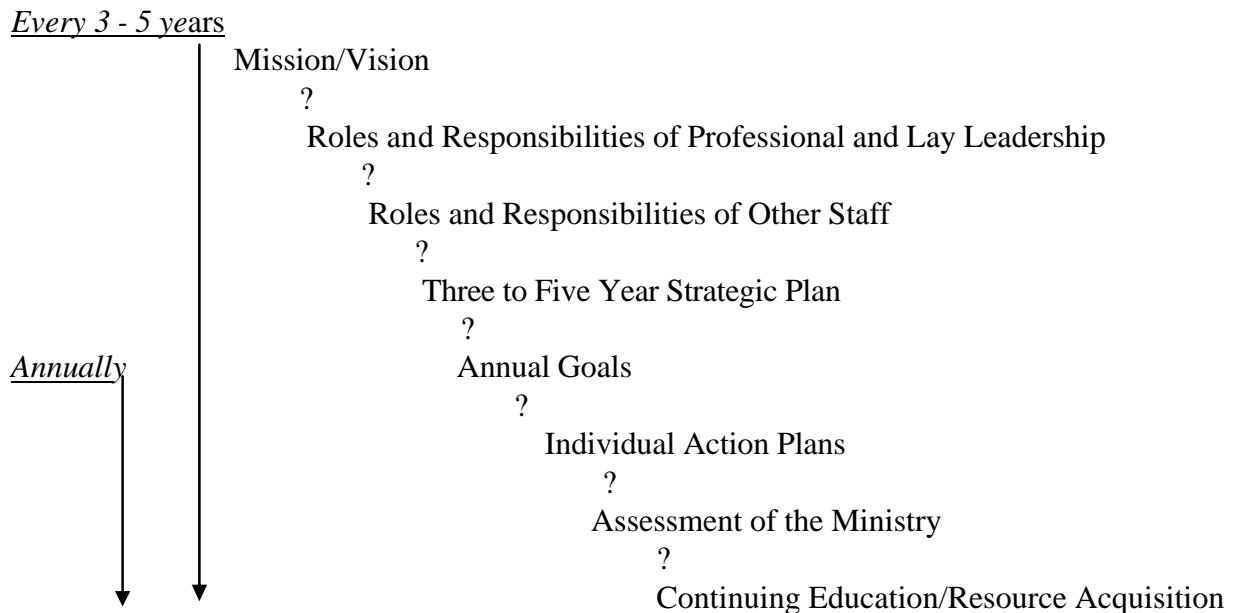
#### **The Process for Promoting Effective Leadership**

As noted in Section I, the assessment process we present in this section focuses on just the last half of the process for promoting effective leadership:

1. Developing a common understanding of the mission/vision statement;
2. Defining the roles and responsibilities of professional and lay leadership in relation to the mission/vision;
3. Defining the roles and responsibilities of other staff in relation to the mission/vision;
4. Completing a 3-5 year strategic plan with agreed upon goals that advance the congregation's mission;
5. Setting annual goals that are consistent with the strategic plan;
6. Developing annual individual action plans for all members of the leadership team that are consistent with the annual goals;
7. Assessing the ministry of the congregation in relation to individual action plans, annual goals, the strategic plan and the mission/vision;
8. Participating in appropriate continuing education and amassing resources as identified in the assessment process;
9. Returning to Step 5 unless it's time to return to Step 1.

The graphic on the following page is designed to help you visualize this process.

## Process for Promoting Effective Leadership in Congregations



For a truly helpful and fair assessment of ministry to occur, a congregation should already have in place:

- A vision statement that captures what the congregation aspires to be and be known for in the larger community;
- An agreed upon and active mission statement that captures what the congregation is doing to be that kind of place;
- A set of covenantal promises defining roles and authorities in governance for the elected and appointed leadership that captures the quality of the relationship among leaders;
- Strategic (long-term) goals to carry forth the vision and mission.

All of these ought to be revisited and updated every 3 to 5 years. Additionally, annual goals that build toward the strategic goals must be in place before an assessment can be conducted.

Finally, to assess the work of individuals in the leadership team of the congregation, each leader should have accurate job descriptions with annually updated operational goals, specific objectives and action plans that are in alignment with the mission and vision of the congregation. (Action plans include what is to be done, by whom, by when and with what resources. More about this later.)

The assessment plan we outline here has four specific objectives:

- a. To determine the next set of annual goals for the congregation.
- b. To determine the next series of goals, objectives and action plans for individual leaders.
- c. To identify resources needed in order to meet these goals.
- d. To continue to improve working relationships within the congregation.

## **The Assessment Process**

This assessment process is designed to support the development of effective, healthy and abiding relationships among the lay and clergy leadership of the congregation. The people in leadership positions are charged with carrying out the congregation's mission and vision and so it makes sense for them to periodically assess their effectiveness — to answer the question, "How well is the congregation carrying out its mission and vision?" This process is mindful of how the leadership deepens the ministry and mission of the congregation.

The assessment process lifts up and celebrates areas of strength and discerns areas that deserve additional resources and attention. It points towards the areas of continuing education and leadership development for the Leadership Team as a whole or for any of its members. It provides direction to the next year's planning process.

Unlike a traditional personnel performance process, the assessment process is designed to deepen the ministry and the mission of the congregation.

A Note About the Leadership Team We have already made several references to a "leadership team." Because of the variation in the ways congregations govern themselves, there is no fixed idea of who comprises the leadership team of any particular congregation. Suffice it to say is that all the members in leadership positions for a specific congregation make up the Leadership Team and should be involved in the assessment process. Often that means minister(s), religious educator(s), governing body, program council and administrator. Each congregation needs to determine the extent of its own Leadership Team.

Time and Resources Needed To complete the assessment process, all members of the Leadership Team will participate in two one-day workshops, scheduled 2 to 6 weeks apart. For best results, Workshop #1 should be led by an outside facilitator. Workshop #2 would benefit from an outside facilitator, but it is not as critical. Each person on the Leadership Team ideally comes prepared to fully engage in discussion, having done advance preparation as directed for both workshops.

**Workshop #1**

## BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT: All members of the Leadership Team review their previous year's operational goals, specific objectives and action plans and be prepared to discuss their responses to the following assessment questions:

- a. How have the objectives been carried out? Have I done the things I said I would?
- b. What are the concrete results of the effort? How has this work deepened the ministry and the mission of this congregation?
- c. What are the insights gained? What could have been done differently?
- d. How have I grown and/or what have I learned in the past year?
- e. What additional resources were needed to make me even more effective?
- f. What adjustments to the structure or practices of the Leadership Team might enable us to function more effectively?
- g. In what one area would consultation from the full Leadership Team be helpful?<sup>6</sup>

## AT THE WORKSHOP

THE AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP #1 (led by an outside facilitator)

(A sample schedule for both workshops is included as Appendix E)

In-gathering and Continental Breakfast

Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting

Review of Day's Agenda

Individual Members Orally Report on their Assessment Responses and Comments

INDIVIDUAL REPORTS: Each member reports orally to the full Leadership Team his or her insights or important reflections from answering the assessment questions. After each presentation, questions and comments are solicited from the rest of the Leadership Team. This is conversational style, with a room for interaction and feedback. This provides opportunity for differences of opinion to be voiced. This can be seen as a good reality check as well as an opportunity to practice speaking the truth in love. Each person's report and comments from the Leadership Team should take no longer than 10 minutes.

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<sup>6</sup>As an example, suppose the Music Director, following a request by the Board, had been using multi-cultural songs in worship to promote cultural diversity, but noticed that the congregation was not participating enthusiastically. The Music Director could ask for a consultation with the Leadership Team on how to make this work more successfully.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF THE CONGREGATION:** The Leadership Team works together to consider the same assessment questions, this time from the frame of the whole congregation. The Team should discuss:

1. How have the objectives been carried out? Have we done the things we said we would?
2. What are the concrete results of the effort? How has this work deepened the ministry and the mission of this congregation?
3. What are the insights gained? What could have been done differently?
4. How have we grown and/or what have we learned in the past year?
5. What additional resources were needed (or would have been helpful) to make us even more effective?
6. What adjustments to the structure or practices of the Leadership Team might enable us to function more effectively?

**DEVELOPMENT OF ANNUAL GOALS:** The Leadership Team works together to develop two or three goals for the coming year that advance the current strategic plan and are in alignment with the congregation's mission and vision statements. These goals should be stated in such a way that it will be clear if (when) the goal is accomplished. If a goal requires intermediate steps, these should also be listed.

#### AFTER THE WORKSHOP

**REFLECTION PAPER:** Each member of the Leadership Team prepares a reflection paper that captures the essence of the two assessments, of her or his own performance and of the congregation. The packet of reflection papers is then made available to the congregation as a whole as a way of sharing the assessment with the congregation while protecting the sensitive nature of the oral reports and conversations. Additionally, the goals for the upcoming year are published as a draft, for comment, and disseminated to the membership through whatever communication outlets provide the greatest coverage. The statement of the goals is written in context, showing how these particular goals align with the strategic plan, and mission and vision statements.

## **Workshop #2**

### BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

IDENTIFICATION OF INDIVIDUAL ANNUAL GOALS: All members of the Leadership Team develop, in writing, their coming year's goals (2-4 of them) using the annual goals agreed on in Workshop #1 as well as the knowledge gained by the Leadership Team's assessment process. As this work is being done, the guiding question ought to be, "How will this work deepen the ministry and the mission of this congregation?"<sup>7</sup>

### THE AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP #2

In-gathering and Continental Breakfast

Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting

Review of Day's Agenda

Review of Annual Goals

GOAL REVIEW: This is a time to review the goals developed at the last workshop and confirm that it is the direction that the Leadership Team wants to go in. Barring any changes, this will be a very brief agenda item.

REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL GOALS: Together, the Leadership Team reviews all the individual proposals, particularly trying to determine that the individual goals build toward the published annual goals and what areas might be missing. Then, if necessary, the entire group works together to negotiate how all the proposals will be integrated with each other in support of a common vision.

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<sup>7</sup>This entire assessment process is cyclical. The first time this process is used it is likely that members will struggle through the process without a previous year's set of personal goals. Nonetheless, it will be instructive if the full process is attempted.

**RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION:** Together, the Leadership Team identifies what resources are needed to achieve the published annual goals as well as individual goals. Resources can include financing, additional staff time, training, capital purchases, etc. Sometimes resources, and even more accurate action plans, can be identified by asking "What might stop us from meeting this goal?" Identifying opposing "forces" is often enlightening.

**DEVELOP INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLANS:** During the workshop, individual members develop action plans that indicate what they will do to meet their individual goals. This will most likely be in the form of a task list, perhaps with parallel columns for "how I will know when this is done," "date to be done," "what's needed to do it," and "who I am working with on this."

**REVIEW INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLANS:** The Leadership Team works together to briefly review all the action plans, specifically looking for places where task items may fall through cracks, checking to make sure that dates are reasonable, and once again assuring that the accomplishment of these individual actions will lead to the accomplishment of the congregation's published annual goals. Of course, these plans must remain flexible throughout the year and should be changed if circumstances demand it.

#### AFTER THE WORKSHOP

**PUBLICATION OF GOALS AND RESOURCES NEEDED:** Publish and disseminate a summary of the congregational assessment, the final version of the upcoming year's annual goals of the congregation, and a list of resources needed to accomplish these goals. It is neither necessary nor desirable to communicate individual goals or action plans.

#### *SPECIAL NOTE*

*We understand that two days of meetings is asking a lot of the leaders of congregations. We think that the plan we've laid out here is the most logical sequence for proceeding. However, it seems possible that the tasks that are allotted to the second workshop can be done either in one workshop, as several short meetings on Sunday mornings, or perhaps mostly by e-mail. We encourage you to develop the most effective approach for YOUR congregation, and then let us know how it went. (See Appendix C for a form you can use to tell us.)*

## **Role of the Committee on Ministry**

In the past, "Ministerial Relations Committees" were asked to play a role in facilitating communications between clergy and the congregation. Often their focus was on the "smoothness" of the clergy's relations to persons and groups within the congregation. The committee's members were regarded as ombudspersons, in place to carry sensitive information between members of the congregation and clergy. Sometimes these committees played a role in the evaluation of the professionals, but their jurisdiction did not encompass the ministry of the whole congregation.

Today, however, many of our congregations have chosen to create a "Committee on Ministry" instead. Its role is to help strengthen the quality of ministry for that congregation. Its main task is to monitor, on a regular and continuing basis, the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry.

Since the congregation's unambiguous understanding of its mission determines the scope of its ministry — to itself and to the world outside its walls, it is the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry to ensure that the congregation has developed that understanding and recognizes its mission in terms of ministry, not merely a grouping of tasks. Therefore, it is logical that the Committee on Ministry has a leading role in guiding the congregation through repeated iterations of the process for promoting effective leadership.

Growing a practice of sharing and being responsible for the congregation's ministry is not simple nor is it easy. It does not happen merely by trusting our good intentions or going to a few workshops or reading a few books. Like any worthwhile spiritual practice, it takes discipline, commitment and faith. It requires clear vision, careful and deliberate planning and includes the art of speaking the truth in love.

Committees on Ministry are the natural locus of leadership for growing this practice, which requires both lay leaders and clergy to work in close collaboration. This is not to imply that lay and called leadership have the same roles and authority. They have quite different and compatible authority and roles. The Committee on Ministry, working closely with the minister/s, is the appropriate group to help define and sort authority and roles among the Leadership Team and then shepherd the congregation along the process for promoting effective leadership.

Together — the minister and the Committee on Ministry — share the responsibility of exploring with and educating the congregation about ministry in general, the specific ministry of that specific congregation, and the partnerships and trust necessary to bring that specific ministry to its fullest blossoming. Together they share the responsibility of guiding the congregation in setting standards of excellence and providing opportunities for all to be held accountable to those standards of excellence.

For more information about Committees on Ministry, refer to Appendix D in this guide.



## IV. MAKING ROOM FOR CHANGE AND GROWTH

Every part of the process for promoting effective leadership, from creating a vision that captures what the congregation aspires to be and be known for in the larger community to embarking on an assessment process like the one outlined in this guide, can be a source of change in a congregation. Since all congregations are complex systems with countless interdependent networks of causality and response, it is important to remember this.

Humans are generally resistant to change even when they report wanting it. Change can be frightening, risky and unsettling, especially if it is a surprise. For every person who wants a certain change there is another who does not. Congregational changes are most effective (and least painful) when people are united in their desire to improve some aspect of congregational life and ministry. Making room for change is an important task in moving forward after assessment. People need assurance that changes are being made for a good reason. It can be helpful if the underlying values (which often have not changed) can be identified and the new initiative is connected with those values. An explanation of what to expect is very important, as is an invitation to participate in healthy change.

One feature that is common to all institutions that manage change successfully is their ability to communicate well, frequently and truthfully. This is always a challenging issue in congregations and one that requires nearly continuous attention to be good at it.

Another feature that promotes the acceptance of changes in congregations is self-awareness. A congregation that is aware of its strengths and weaknesses is in a good position to make changes that build on their strengths compensate for areas of weakness. Interestingly, increased congregational self-awareness may be the single most important result of an assessment process. It may also be an important focus of continued work for some leaders.

Self-awareness for individuals is also critical for forming and maintaining healthy relationships. Individuals who understand themselves and the impact they have on the world are better able to reflect on the complex network of causality, which exists in every congregation. They are better able to assess personal and institutional options for growth and change. Failure to encourage self-awareness and personal responsibility risks blaming behavior and an over focus on certain individuals who will not be able to change an entire system or institution.

Many tools, in addition to an assessment process, exist to help individuals better understand themselves as individuals, leaders, followers and communicators. There are several easy inventories that leadership teams may use to better understand individual and group dynamics. These are helpful in developing strong leadership teams and effective congregational communication patterns. There are inventories that help people learn about their learning styles, personality styles, leadership styles, conflict management styles and communication styles. (References for some of these inventories can be found in Section VI, Bibliography.)

These exercises in self-awareness encourage people to recognize and respect a range of diversity about which they had little previous awareness. Self-awareness is also critical for developing an acceptance of accountability and mutual responsibility for desired outcomes. When people are willing to hold themselves accountable for their role in advancing the mission of the congregation

the covenant is strengthened and the process for promoting effective leadership indeed becomes a way to deepen a congregation's understanding of ministry, develop resources for supporting their mission, and setting goals for carrying out that work more effectively.

**Closing thought**

We are fortunate that there are many opportunities for congregations, volunteer leaders and professional religious leaders to reflect on their health and practice. It is important to continue to grow and learn in order to remain vitally connected with life. However, the perpetual pursuit of perfection through study and hard work is its own idolatry. We are imperfect humans doing the best we can most of the time. The covenantal relationship calls us to mutuality, abiding relationship and regard. It also calls us to the discipline of acceptance — gracious acceptance of the imperfect and glorious humans we all are.

## V. APPENDIX

### A. Glossary of Terms

**CENTER** — The continuing education committee of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association. Specifically, "Committee for Education, Nurture, Training, Enrichment and Renewal."

**Committee on Ministry** — A standing committee of a congregation whose focus is on the ministry of the congregation. It is not the same as a Ministerial Relations Committee whose focus is on the relationships between the minister and the congregants.

**Fulfilling the Promise** — Part of a project of the Unitarian Universalist Association for strategic planning that encourages congregations to embark on a process of renewal that includes developing (new) mission and vision statements as well as a recovenanting process.

**LREDA** — The Liberal Religious Educators' Association is a continental professional association of Unitarian Universalist religious educators formed to further high professional standards and work for full professional recognition for religious educators. Members include ministers and directors of religious education. It is not part of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Department of Religious Education. It is an independent affiliate organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association, similar to the UUMA.

**MFC** — The Ministerial Fellowship Committee is a 14-person committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association. It has jurisdiction over all phases of ministerial credentialing. Candidates for ministerial fellowship are interviewed by the Committee before fellowship is granted. Additionally, the MFC has the authority to remove ministerial fellowship.

**Operational goals** — Those goals that are quite concrete and can be implemented by very specific action plans. They are part of the Leadership Team's individual, specific action plans.

**Strategic goals** — Those broad goals that the congregation sets when it determines what its mission is to be.

**UUMA** — The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association is the continental professional association of Unitarian Universalist ministers and ministerial students formed to enhance ministerial skills, standards, effectiveness and leadership. It is not part of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Department of Ministry. The UUMA is an independent affiliate of the UUA like other Unitarian Universalist organizations such as the Unitarian Universalist Musician's Network, Unitarian Universalist Leadership Schools Network and LREDA.

## B. Three Approaches to Congregational Self-assessment

Learnings from the Unitarian Universalist Association's *Fulfilling Our Promise* program reveal that vital to creating healthy congregations is a periodic overall review of the congregation's collective and shared ministries. To that end, the Unitarian Universalist Association suggests three approaches to Congregational Self-Assessment. A congregation may choose from among these which approach fits its needs and time frame.

- The Comprehensive Congregational Assessment includes three parts:
  - (1) a congregational profile,
  - (2) an assessment form that can be completed by a leadership team or the whole congregation, and
  - (3) a guide for community interviews. The areas evaluated include: growth, community building, outward focus, religious growth, worship, leadership, and resources.
- An Annual Congregational Evaluation can best be used as part of an annual planning retreat of a congregation or its leadership. It includes an assessment form for congregational members and an outline of an annual planning event for the congregational leadership or the congregation.
- The Interactive Workbook: Faith Communities Today is a web-based interactive workbook that includes congregational self-assessment questions on five areas: public worship, spiritual growth, inviting and including, community outreach, and managing and leading. After completing the survey, the respondent can compare the results with the results of other Unitarian Universalist congregations, congregations from other religious traditions or congregations in different regions of the United States (which was the focus of the survey). The comparative data are provided as part of the *Faith Communities Today* survey, which involved over 41 faith traditions.

For detailed information about any of these approaches, contact the District Office or the *Department of Congregational, District and Extension Services* of the Unitarian Universalist Association at 617/742-2100.

### **C. Feedback, Insight, Learning Form for Assessing Our Leadership**

When you complete your assessment process, please take a few moments to answer the questions on this form and send them to the Ministerial Development Office, Department of Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Association, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, FAX 617-742-2875. We are interested in improving this guide.

Name of Congregation:

Name of Person Completing Form:

Position in Congregation and Daytime Phone Number:

1. Did you follow this process exactly as laid out in this guide? If not, please tell us what adjustments you made.
  
2. Did this assessment process help you to determine how well you are serving the mission of the church?
  
3. Did this assessment process help your congregation's leaders clarify their jobs for the coming year?
  
4. Did this assessment process help you identify areas in which the congregation can do better?
  
5. Did this assessment process result in any continuing education recommendations?
  
6. Did the assessment process, AS YOU CONDUCTED IT, prove helpful?
  
7. What, if anything, will you do differently next time?
  
8. What should we change or add to this guide to make it more effective for you? (Please be as specific as possible.)
  
  
10. What else do you want us to know?

**D. Growing a Practice of Shared Ministry: The learning and teaching work of Committees on Ministry** by Beverly Sadownick Smrha, District Consultant, Pacific Central District of the Unitarian Universalist Association; August 25, 2000

Learning how to practice shared ministry in Unitarian Universalist congregations.

In many of our congregations, clergy and laity — working together — are discovering their passion for shared ministry. They are developing programs that provide opportunities for members of the congregation to partner with their called clergy in providing more comprehensive ministerial services to the congregation, to their own families, to their places of employment, and to their civic communities. Laity are making deep and long lasting commitments to learn from and apprenticeship with their ministers. Ordained ministers, who have pledged their life work to the practice of ministry, are experiencing the joy of teaching the arts and the skills of ministry to others so that more ministry can be available to the world. One or two cannot do what one or two plus twenty apprentices can do.

Why shared ministry is required of us as Unitarian Universalists.

The congregational covenant that is central to our association as Unitarian Universalists is that we promise to one another our mutual trust and support. This promise recognizes the relationship of congregation to congregation and, within each congregation, from congregant to congregant.

We respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person, we commit ourselves to foster spiritual growth and religious development for each and everyone of us and for each of our congregational communities.

In our free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This means that we are each accountable for and to each other and to our religious communities. We *are* each other's keeper.

From the chapter "Our Ministry", in the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*:

"When Unitarian Universalists speak of ministry, we are describing what we all do together as members of our faith communities. We have ordained ministers in our tradition, of course, but those who serve their world in the name of the church extend far beyond the clergy. Though we are a diverse population, a common truth for Unitarian Universalist communities remains: regardless of the size or constellation of the congregation, the ministry in our faith communities is mutual . . . . . As people of faith, our ministry involves taking care of one another, maintaining an emotional and spiritual connection throughout life's changes. As we engage in mutual ministry, we feed one another. And in so doing, we are able to turn to lend our succor to the world. Our pastoral presence, our religious education, and our social action are all grounded in the ministry we give to and receive from one another."

We are called by our covenantal promise to each other to intentionally grow a practice of shared or mutual ministry in our congregations. As we learn ..... and teach ..... and practice new ways of being together, Committees on Ministry (CoM) play a central role.

### Where Shared Ministry is centered in our congregations.

Growing a practice of shared ministry is not simple nor is it easy. It does not happen merely by trusting our good intentions or going to a few workshops or reading a few books. Like any worthwhile spiritual practice, it takes discipline, commitment and faith. It requires clear vision, careful and deliberate planning and then practicing the art of speaking the truth in love.

Committees on Ministry (CoM) are the natural locus of leadership for growing this practice, which requires both lay and ordained colleagues working in close collaboration. This is not to imply that lay and ordained leadership have the same roles and authority. They have quite different and compatible authority and roles. The CoM is the appropriate reflection group to discern the distinction between these for that unique congregation. Without full collaboration and the wholesome exercise of lay authority and clergy authority, shared ministry cannot flourish.

The depth and quality of the relationship that develops between a minister and a congregation is generally parallel to the depth and quality of the working relationship between the CoM and the minister. Together ..... the minister with the CoM ..... share the responsibility of exploring with and educating the congregation about ministry in general, the specific ministry of that specific congregation, and the partnerships and trust necessary to bring that specific ministry to its fullest blossoming. Together they share the responsibility of setting standards of excellence and providing opportunities for all to be held accountable to those standards of excellence.

The congregation's unambiguous understanding of its mission determines the scope of its ministry — to itself and to the world outside its walls. It is the responsibility of the CoM to ensure that the congregation has developed that understanding and recognizes its mission in terms of ministry, not merely groupings of tasks. We are talking about the total ministry of the church --- the integrated work of clergy and laity; volunteer leadership and employed leadership; friends and members; people of all ages --- children, youth and adults.

### The Committee on Ministry's relationship with the congregation.

Trust, integrity and confidentiality are essential to the work of this committee. The members must have the trust of the congregation at large, the governing board and the minister. They must be perceived as having a firm commitment to the overall health of the congregation (as opposed to a special interest within the life of the congregation.)

I recommend that CoM members not be current board members, although previous board members can often be helpful as members on the CoM. The Board and the CoM have separate and related responsibilities and it is strongly advised to keep those responsibilities clearly separate. It is helpful to have a board liaison (such as the board president or moderator) to the CoM kept current on matters of importance.

It is also helpful to have periodic reports from the CoM to the board at the board's regular

meetings. Maintaining a close relationship between the governing Board and the CoM is essential to build trust and working understandings between these two groups.

It is wise to remember that the minister and the congregation members have a professional — not private — relationship with each other. The CoM is not the minister's personal support group. Both the CoM and the minister need to make sure that the minister has sufficient personal and collegial support mechanisms outside the congregation.

### Committee structure and membership.

The CoM is responsible to the governing board and to the parish minister(s) for supporting and monitoring the health of this church-wide ministry. One effective way of appointing new members of the committee is for the governing board to choose from a list prepared in collaboration by the minister and the ongoing CoM, or the Search Committee in the case of a new professional ministry.

The term of office should be sufficiently long enough to enable the members to develop a deep trust with one another and with the minister. Terms should be staggered so the CoM's institutional history is not lost in transition. Perhaps each term could be three years, no one serving more than six years. The size of the CoM could be five or six members for a mid-size or larger congregation and three members for a very small congregation.

### Committee meetings.

The CoM should meet regularly, monthly, with a prepared agenda for each meeting.

It is important for the committee to take the pulse of the health of the congregation's ministry at each meeting. Each participant is responsible for being sufficiently involved in the life of the congregation so that they can each briefly report on how the congregation is attending to its mission. By watching and listening to what is going on in the church, by paying attention to what needs are and are not being met, how relationships between different groups within the congregation are developing or deteriorating, how the church is relating to its neighboring community, how welcoming is the congregation to visitors and inviting to new friends and members, the CoM can focus its attention on the vitality and health of the congregation and, when appropriate, steer resources to emerging issues.

An occasional meeting without the active participation of the minister can sometimes be useful when the minister is not physically available. It is essential however that this not be treated as a secret meeting, but that the minister be advised of the purpose of the meeting in advance and informed as to the substance of the discussions shortly after the meeting. The members of the committee and the minister are colleagues and must foster good collegial working relationships.

It is very important that the committee develop a code of expectations, behaviors, and responsibilities so that all members can be held accountable to an agreed upon process and standards.



All committee meetings should be conducted as "executive sessions", that is, all discussions within the meeting to be held in strictest confidence. These discussions often inform and direct the committee's follow-up work with the congregation, so the subject matter then becomes public. However, the specific content of the discussions must be held in strictest confidence within the CoM. It must be a fully safe place to share perspectives and experiences.

The differences between secrecy and confidentiality sometimes appear subtle and confusing. It is important that each CoM understand what its operating expectations are for work within that committee.

At some part of the regularly scheduled monthly meetings, members of the congregation could be invited to make presentations, present concerns or appreciations. This portion of the meeting would be an open session, that is, it would not operate in executive session.

### Responsibilities of the Committee on Ministry.

- Continually monitors congregational life;
- Helps model healthy and deepening relationships with minister(s) and program staff;
- Continually educates itself about ministry, including such actions as supporting an Alban Institute membership for the committee chair;
- Supports continuing education of the congregation for its growing understanding and skill in shared ministry;
- Coordinates periodic assessments of the shared ministry of the congregation and its leadership components;
- Periodically advises the board regarding the health of the shared ministry;
- Supports the minister's planning for continuing education, sabbaticals, and other professional development;
- Recommends and actively supports such plans to the board and to the congregation.

### Assessments of the shared ministry of the congregation and its leadership.

We are each accountable for and to each other and to our religious communities. Periodic assessments of how the ministry of the congregation — as well as its lay and professional leadership components — is living out the congregation's mission are important.

The purpose of these assessments, both the congregation wide assessment and the congregational leadership assessment, is to reflect on the big picture and then fine tune priorities. It is to celebrate areas of strength as well as to discern areas that deserve the focus of additional resources and attention.

For a truly helpful assessment to occur, a congregation should have in place

- a broadly accepted identity and vision statement that captures what the congregation aspires to be and be known for in the larger community;
- an agreed upon and active verb laden mission statement that captures what the congregation is doing to be that kind of place;
- a set of covenantal promises defining roles and authorities in governance for the elected and appointed leadership that captures the quality of the relationship among leaders;
- an on-going process for determining short term and long term goals and action plans for the called, elected and appointed leadership to implement.

One outcome of these assessments is to develop the next series of short term and long term goals and action plans that are truly based on the congregation's vision, mission, and covenants. They focus our energy on what we are yearning to become, how we are actually moving in that direction and what resources (e.g., educational, financial, staffing) do we need to utilize in order to help us do this better. This places the assessment away from grade giving, away from reactivity, so that it becomes a tool for planning and building even better working relationships.

Some basic understandings of this work, from the UUA's Assessing our Leadership Team (formerly called the Review and Renewal Team):

- Assessment is an analysis of a system.
- Mission is why we exist.
- Goals are concrete; they include what is it we will do, by whom, by when and what resources are needed.
- Covenant is how we are together and relates to the quality of our relationship.
- A renewal addresses what's next for us.
- Leadership in our congregations includes prophetic witness, vision and integrity.
- Congregational Assessment process includes three steps:
  1. Development of mission/vision understandings.
  2. Participation by entire congregation in a systems analysis/assessment effort.
  3. Participation by congregational leadership in a self-assessment that leads to goal redefinition.

Recommended reading:

*The Shared Ministry Sourcebook: Resources for Clergy and Laity Ministering Together in Unitarian Universalist Congregations* edited by Barbara Child

*The Congregational Handbook: How to Develop and Sustain Your Unitarian Universalist Congregation*, third edition, edited by Lawrence X. Peers

## **E. Sample Schedules for Workshop #1 and Workshop #2**

### THE AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP #1.

- 8:45 In-gathering and Continental Breakfast
- 9:00 Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting
- 9:05 Review of Day's Agenda
- 9:10 Individual Members Orally Report on their Assessment Responses and Comments  
(Assume 15 members at 10 minutes each.)
- 10:20 Break
- 10:30 Resume Oral Reports and Comments
- 11:40 Leadership Team Assesses the Ministry of the Congregation
- 12:15 Break for lunch
- 12:45 Resume Assessment of Ministry
- 2:00 Break
- 2:10 Develop Annual Goals for the Coming Year
- 3:55 Closing Words
- 4:00 Close

### THE AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP #2.

- 8:45 In-gathering and Continental Breakfast
- 9:00 Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting
- 9:05 Review of Day's Agenda
- 9:10 Review of Annual Goals
- 9:30 Review of Individual Goals
- 10:30 Break
- 10:40 Determine Resources Needed to Achieve Goals
- 11:15 Develop Individual Action Plans
- 12:15 Break for lunch
- 12:45 Review Individual Action Plans
- 1:55 Closing Words
- 2:00 Close

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UUA Resources for Congregational Leaders

Website: [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

*Congregational Handbook*, 1995

Print copy and on line with index and process tool for effective use

*UUA Guide to Sabbatical Planning*

Department of Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Association

*Interconnections* Newsletter for Congregational Leaders

*Unitarian Universalist Leader*, newspaper format publication  
UUA Resources for Religious Educators  
*The Basic Option in Unitarian Universalist Religious Education Leadership*  
*Credentialed Religious Educator -A Professional Option*  
*Continuing Education for Religious Educators*  
Resources for Religious Educators on the UUA Website: [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

#### District Resources

Most districts offer a wide range of workshops for congregational leaders in addition to consultations for particular issues in a congregation. A number of districts have specially trained volunteers able to help a congregation address a particular issue. Please call your district office early in the development of the response plan.

*Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*  
*Discovering Your Conflict Management Style*, Alban Institute.  
*The L.E.A.D. Questionnaire* by Hersey and Blanchard, a situational leadership inventory.  
McBer & Company: Training Resource Group 617-927-5080  
*Studying Congregations* by Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley and William McKinney Abingdon Press, 1998

#### Other Publications:

Alban Institute Newsletter: Congregations [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org)  
National Center for Non-profit Boards [www.ncnb.org](http://www.ncnb.org)