All’s Well That Ends Well: Staff Departures

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May This Flame

May this flame, symbol of transformation since time began, fire our curiosity, strengthen our wills, and sustain our courage as we seek what is good within and around us.

*Bets Wienecke*
Who's in the Room?
Goals of Our Time Together

• Offer a theological framework

• Normalize transitions

• Equip leaders
  – To understand congregational response
  – With knowledge of practical resources
  – For difficult situations
Our Living Tradition

James Luther Adams, Unitarian Minister, Theologian

Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism (paraphrased):

– Revelation and truth are constantly revealed.
– Relationships should be based on mutual consent.
– We have a moral obligation to work for a just and loving community.
– Good things happen because people make them happen.
– Divine and human resources are available to make meaningful change, thus giving cause for abundant hope.
Perspective

• Ministerial transitions in MidAmerica this year:
  187 Congregations
  – 10 ministers just settled
  – 10 congregations entering search
  – 7 in the middle of an interim period
  – ?? Other limited-time ministries, short contracts?

• Other lead staff transitions: even more frequent

• Others are going through it

• Not your first or last transition
Reasons for Departures

• Retirement
• Fired
• Family reasons
• Illness
• Death
• Need better compensation
• Move away from conflict
• Career advancement
• Choose to leave the field
• New congregational needs arise – and are noticed
Departures Can Be….

• Expected or Unexpected

• Amicable or Forced/Negotiated

• A Time for Continuity AND Transformation
Reactions to Departures

- Shock
- Anger
- Grief
- Relief
- Gratitude
- Curiosity
- Delight
- Anxiety

- Disappointment
- Hope
- Ambivalence
- Fear
- Imagination
- Reactivity
- Bewilderment

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Understanding Reactions

• A congregant may have:
  – more than one emotion at the same time
  – different emotions over time

• Different people:
  – have different emotions
  – express the same emotion in different ways

• Roller coaster of change
One model: The Roller Coaster of Change

Mapped to Kubler-Ross grief cycle

At any point in time, people will be in different places. Leaders often “ride” more quickly.
Responding to Reactions

• Acknowledge all feelings as real
• Acknowledge your own feelings…while you attend to others
• Be conscious of your pace
  – Avoid rushing
  – Avoid getting stuck
• Responding vs Reacting
• Thinking vs Over-thinking
Examining Needs

Fitting new peg into the old hole?
What else has changed… or is changing, or could be changing?

• Other staff
• New initiatives
• Size of congregation
• Governance structure
• New needs lead to new expectations of role
• What else?
How does change happen?
Interim Professionals

• Not just placeholders
• 5 Focus Points
  – Heritage
  – Mission
  – Leadership
  – Connections
  – Future
• Also perform customary responsibilities
• Preparing to leave from Day One
• Following long-tenured or frequent turnover
• Following beloved or problematic
• *In the Interim*, Ed. B. Child & K. Kron, UUA Bookstore
Parting Well

• Communication
  – Thoughtful sequencing and messaging
  – Clear and timely to whole congregation

• Closure
  – Worship ritual
  – Newsletter piece from the professional

• Celebration
  – Appropriately scaled
  – Unique to the individual

• Covenant
  – With successor and/or with congregational leadership
  – Congregational health
One more “C”

Staff member leaving under a....
Congregations are...

Covenantal Communities

- Ethical: co-creation, benevolence
- Time Frame: ongoing, unending
- Focus: mutual relationship
- Values: protect least of these, pursuit of justice, righteousness and mercy
- Objective: fulfillment of promise
- Outcomes: restored community, right relationship, blessed future
- Failure: broken relationship, isolation
- Accountability: honoring covenant, reconciliation

Employers

- Ethical: utilitarian
- Time Frame: beginning, ending
- Focus: supply and demand
- Values: offer, acceptance, fairness, equity
- Objective: fulfillment of contract
- Outcomes: career satisfaction, monetary reward, professional growth, job security
- Failure: firing, unemployment
- Accountability: job description, mediation

See *When Moses Meets Aaron*, by S. Beaumont & G. Rendle
Involuntary Departures

• Tough work in our communities
• Balancing several dimensions: covenant and employee
  – Covenant with congregation and their expectations
  – Legal responsibilities as employer:
    • Protection of congregation from legal implications
  – Authority and leadership
    • Whose job is it to do this
  – Transparency and privacy
    • What can be shared, what cannot be
Involuntary Departures: Documentation & Legal Responsibilities

• Clearly articulate and document cause
  – Personnel Policies followed
  – Letter of agreement followed
  – Bylaws and other governing documents followed
  – Regular evaluations
  – Plans for improvement
  – Documentation of any irregular activities
  – Consult appropriate persons: Board, Attorney, Personnel Committee, insurance company, etc.
  – Give notice in humane fashion
  – Consider immediate versus delayed departure
Involuntary Departures: Authority and Leadership

• Ask before you have need
• Who are the parties involved? What are their respective roles:
  – Board
  – Personnel Committee
  – Head of Staff
  – Committees
  – Religious Professionals
Involuntary Departures: Transparency and Privacy

- Keep employment and personnel information private
- Balance congregation’s assumption of right to know, and employee’s right to privacy
  - Ensure there is no cause for suit by employee for defamation, wrongful dismissal, hindrance in future employment
  - Hard to negotiate if distrust in system and/or if person departing has key following
- Future references
  - Consider safeguarding congregation
- Balancing accountability and mercy
Starting Well

• Announce thru all communication vehicles.
  – Send announcement to new minister/staff member

• Update website, office nameplate, etc.

• Make office space inviting.
  – Remove artifacts of predecessor
  – Note of welcome on the desk

• Ensure comfort on 1st day: where to park, which entrance, working email.

• Onboarding

• Ritual

• Staff Re-launch
Ministerial Transitions

Regional Transitions Program Managers

• **New England**: Joe Sullivan, jsullivan@uua.org
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Rev. Keith Kron, UUA Transitions Director

• [www.uua.org/transitions](http://www.uua.org/transitions)
• Transitional Ministry Handbook and Settlement Handbook
• *In the Interim* (thru UUA bookstore)
• Keith says, “Say good-bye well to your minister.”
Ministerial Transitions

But wait, there’s more!

• Regional Transition Coaches
  (or Ministerial Settlement Reps)

• Compensation Consultants

• *Interim Ministry Primer for Staff*
Transitions of Other Staff

• Connect with regional staff

• UUA website resources
  – [From Starting to Parting](#)
  – [Interim Religious Educators page](#)

• [Guild of Interim Religious Educators](#) for interim DRE

• Have good closure with departing staff

• [Compensation Consultants](#)
Video Resources

Currently live on MidAmerica Region website:

• [www.midamericauua.org](http://www.midamericauua.org)
• Services tab, then choose Transitions from drop-down menu
• 30-ish very short videos cover ministerial transitions
  – Ministerial departures
  – Negotiated Terminations
  – Next Steps and the Interim Process
  – Search Committee: Creation and Process
  – Search Committee Tasks
  – Candidating
  – Part-time Ministerial Search
• Some apply to other professionals
Your Questions
Closing Words

UU Leader’s Prayer

With gratitude and grace

• we lead forward to answer the call of our faith,
• we move happily together into the unknown,
• we open ourselves to growth,
• we go forth to begin the change to our corner of the world,
• we covenant together to transform the world through love
• and we are moved by Spirit to accomplish good works with compassion and love for all.

Kirk Bogue and Mid-South District Board, 9/9/12
Dedicated to Nancy Bartlett, Former UUA Trustee from MSD