

**Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees  
of The Unitarian Universalists of Transylvania County  
January 11, 2016**

## **The Need for Systemic Thinking**

I am writing my report in advance of our upcoming meeting so that you may have time to read, reflect, and perhaps respond to it. I am writing quickly, on my day off, because this seems urgent. Please understand that this is a DRAFT, and that with more time I could write a more elegant and succinct report.

I believe the systemic analysis of where we are in this transition time, could be helpful, since we tend to think "linearly" (i.e.: direct cause = direct effect. Example: Women shoots bullet at deer. Deer falls dead and becomes food for the hunter. Cause and effect are very clear.)

If we are to successfully navigate through the turbulence of transition, we must all understand systems-thinking, (i.e.: the understanding that everything affects everything else, and no one in particular is "to blame.") Example: Your minister retired; you introduced Policy Governance; and you hired an "outsider" into the system as its leader. The new leader is addressing many of the issues that have been "smoldering" for years. We now have a few small fires to put out – by observing our covenant of right relationship and some good strategic planning.

It would be easy to say that an individual is the problem. However easy scapegoating may be, it is never effective, because the root cause of a complicated systemic challenge has myriad causes. (See *Generation to Generation* by Rabbi Friedman for application of this theory within a congregation.)

The solution is a simple, elegant, well-thought out strategic plan that can be explained and implemented in a relatively short time. And, as Friedman states, over and over again: "Remain a non-anxious presence."

It would be easy to say that UUTC is having problems because "Paula's not a very good minister." And, although I have not heard this, somebody could project their own anxiety onto a lay leader – saying, "We're having problems because said Officer or Committee Chair or Team Leader is "not a good leader."

The problem with this assessment is that the leader(s) named as "the problem" is/are simply the "symptom bearers" of the ailments of the entire system. We are hitting a normal and predictable "rough spot" that I would honestly refer to as "growing pains." To explain, let me list what I perceive to be the four systemic transitions unfolding:

### ***Four Transitions in One***

I believe much of the confusion and anxiety around this interim ministry is that **UUTC is going through four challenging transitions, simultaneously:**

1) **Letting go of your dearly beloved minister of many years, Rev. Ernie Mills, and planning for a future with a new Settled Minister.** That, alone, would be cause enough for anxiety in almost any religious community. Ernie's a great guy. How could one not love him? Or miss him? Or wish that things were back to the way things were before Ernie retired? That's natural – and working through the grief and loss could and possibly “should” be the entire focus of the Interim. However, there are three other challenging transitions that we also must face together.

2) **UUTC is moving from a “Pastoral” to a “Program-Sized” Congregation.** Once a congregation surpasses about 150 members and pledging friends who participate on a regular basis, it is no longer possible to manage the organization in the way that you previously did. The book *Raising the Roof* by Alice Mann does a fairly good (albeit in some areas outdated) job of explaining the difficulties associated with such a transition.

I am attaching a summary of Mann's book, so that you may have a better understanding of the SYSTEMIC nature of this challenge. I will caution you that many researchers, consultants, and practitioners agree with the overall hypothesis of Mann's book. However, many agree it also needs some updating. I believe there are several copies of this book “floating around” at UUTC.

3) **UUTC adopted a new governance structure.** In many instances, the change in model of governance is directly related to the transition from Pastoral to Program size congregation. To help understand what “Policy Governance” is, I am attaching a UUA-created PowerPoint Slide Show on the topic. Perhaps we should consider having or attending a workshop on this topic in the near future?

Dan Hotchkiss's book, *Governance and Ministry*, was part of the “Blue Print” the Administration Committee used when developing the guidelines for Policy Governance outlined in the attached document, “Governance Structure Document.” Although most people at UUTC are not aware of this, the Board adopted a totally new governance structure on, I believe, May 15, 2015 – just a few months before I arrived.

Dave Roberts has also ordered copies of the Hotchkiss book for the Board and other UUTC Lay Leaders to read. <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5628369-governance-and-ministry>

I have also attached a critique of Hotchkiss's book, and agree with at least some of it.

The “ordinary” challenge of adopting a new internal organizational structure to implement Policy Governance would be daunting for a Settled Minister already familiar with the congregation. Undertaking the transition with a new Interim Minister who does not yet know either the players or the playing field makes it that much more challenging.

There are several other books that could shed light on the systemic issues we are facing. First, I would recommend *In the Interim*, edited by UUA Transition Director Keith

Kron: <http://www.amazon.com/In-Interim-Strategies-Ministers-Congregations-ebook/dp/B00C2EYMFQ>

I believe there are several copies “floating around” among members of UUTC.

Finally, as referenced above, I would recommend skimming “Generation to Generation” by Rabbi Friedman. It is a classic for clergy interested in understanding how “Squeezing one end of the balloon causes the other to swell.”

Yes. It’s a LOT to read, absorb and apply. Therein lies the challenge. And, it’s “all in my head.” The challenge is how to structure the process so that you can use me as a resource, without me leading the process.

#### **4) UUTC is starting to talk about Mission-Based Budgeting.**

All of the above-referenced issues must be “worked through” in order for us to successfully implement Mission-Based Budgeting. For this, we have been reading ***Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate***, “in our abundant spare time.”

It is my observation that UUTC has a tradition of secrecy and mentality of scarcity around money. We are now trying to introduce the idea of dreaming about what you want to accomplish, and then raising the money to do it. This requires open and honest conversations that make many of our members uncomfortable. How we help facilitate this conversation in a congregation that has an historical reluctance for doing so? And, which, to the best of my knowledge, does not have a Mission Statement?

### **The “Solution:” Create a Strategic Plan**

Most experts familiar with this transition will freely admit that the move from Pastoral-sized congregation with strong committee leadership, to Program-sized congregation with Policy Governance is the most difficult of all size transitions. I believe educating the congregation about this dynamic would be helpful – but resources are limited, and most people do not find this topic interesting.

To create a path forward, UUTC leaders who love this congregation must sit down as a mature, rational, emotionally engaged team to develop a plan for successfully accomplishing the Five Tasks of Interim Ministry, below.

From the clause in my contract regarding the purpose of an Interim Ministry:

**“An Interim Ministry is designed as a time of self-reflection and visioning for the future.”**

### **Five Tasks of Interim Ministry**

1. **Understand and honor our history and heritage.** -- *Begun at a Start-up Retreat with Rev. Kathy McGowan of the UUA, with various efforts to continue this work during this transition period. This includes the Visioning Retreat on January 30, and any other events or activities that emerge as a result of that program.*
2. **Recognize our unique identity, strengths, needs, and challenges.** – *Begun at Start-up retreat and on-going at the Visioning Retreat on January 30.*
3. **Understand appropriate leadership roles and navigate shifts in leadership that may occur during this time of transition.** -- *In progress. This is one important area where we will need to focus our energy in the upcoming months. The topic should also be addressed at the January 23 workshop in Greenville, and may be tangentially addressed at the January 30 Visioning Retreat.*
4. **Strengthen ties with our UU District, the UUA, and the larger world.** – *This work began in earnest when UUTC became engaged with the UUA for guidance and resources for the Search Process. It has continued with leadership coaching and consulting with Kathy McGowan during our “Start-Up Retreat” in the fall; and is available through involvement in activities such as the Conflict Management Workshop in Greenville; the Visioning Retreat; and introduction of guest speakers, etc.*
5. **Renew our vision; strengthen stewardship; and prepare to embrace the future with revitalized zest.** *In progress. The January 30 Workshop is where we will begin this work in earnest. It is imperative that we have a productive retreat if UUTC is going to have a successful search for a Settled Minister.*

This fifth point includes developing a MISSION and VISION based on SHARED VALUES; a work plan of identified action items and people responsible for completing them, by a specific date, within a certain budget. It is imperative that we step back and reflect what is happening – from a systemic perspective. “Stepping out onto the balcony of mature leadership,” will allow us to be guided by both wisdom and compassion in this process, and will eliminate personal attacks on individuals.

Since members and friends of UUTC likely feel the anxiety caused by these changes, but don't know how to address them systemically, it is common that people will blame the minister, often with personal attacks that question competence and involve character defamation.

It does not need to be an emotional power struggle. Once UUTC works through your

Mission, Vision and Values, the rest of the Interim Period becomes a matter of project management done in strategic, yet heart-filled manner.

Returning to the challenge of adopting Policy Governance: We have been “test driving” this new governance model for six months now, and some of the limitations are becoming evident. This is not anyone’s “fault.” Instead, each bump we hit is an indication we must make various adjustments to the SYSTEM, so the entire SYSTEM operates more effectively. To stretch the automotive analogy to the breaking point: we have a new driver operating a prototype “vehicle” while trying to design and build new roads ahead of us. How could this possibly go smoothly from the outset, without months and months of training and planning?

We now have 6 months of “training and planning” under our belts and can begin to assess which elements of the SYSTEM work well; which need to be tweaked; and which need to be redesigned entirely, or eliminated.

The UUA website has many valuable resources for congregations in transition between Settled Ministers: <http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/interim>

I believe the attached “Interim Ministry Appraisal” form may serve as a good conversation starter for this most important work.

I look forward to the exciting challenges and new opportunities that this work will yield.

“Love will find its way through paths where wolves would fear to prey.”

**--Lord Byron**

Respectfully submitted,



Paula R. Gable