

Pastor's Report to Council August 2021

In the following report I summarize a few items related to the following:

- A. upcoming events, calendar, newsletter shift
- B. worship reminders
- C. July 18 future of faith formation and music meeting
- D. creative worship planning team,
- E. approach for recruiting a new music minister/choir director, and
- F. beginning the conversation around structure.

A. Upcoming Events, Calendar, newsletter shift

I asked Ellen to connect with the leaders in the congregation to update the calendar with all known activities and events through the end of the year. I asked Ellen to check in with leaders monthly to continually look at least 3 months ahead to update and add activities. It would be helpful for leaders to provide updates to the office on an ongoing basis to ensure that our calendar and website reflects activities as soon as a date/event is confirmed or changed (and to specify if in-person, zoom, and for a team or open to all).

We plan to move the monthly newsletter publication to the third week of the month (week following council) and changing the rhythm and focus (to publish every two months and a couple of special editions).

Calendar would look like:

	Focus	Published
Jan	Annual Meeting/Report	Last week of year
Feb - Mar	Lent	3 rd Week Jan
Apr	Holy Week/Earth Day	3 rd Week Mar
May - June	Yard Sale, Late Spring, ONA Sunday	3 rd Week Apr
Jul - Aug	Summer programming	3 rd Week Jun
Sept - Oct	Home Coming, Stewardship	3 rd Week Aug
Nov - Dec	CotH, Advent, Christmas	3 rd Week Oct

Here is why: It takes time and effort to gather and organize the information for the newsletter. And when thinking about the rhythm of the congregation, publishing the newsletter the week following council would make for more timely updates to the congregation and ensure that the newsletter arrives before the start of the month.

B. Worship

Worship will continue at 9am through Labor Day with worship being hosted at East Woodstock for August and returning to our facility Sept 5. Although Sept 5 is the first Sunday, we will not have communion and will instead offer communion on Sept 12, Homecoming Sunday.

Sept 12 Worship reverts to 10am

As we look to return to First Congregational amid the rise of the delta variant, it is unclear how we might modify our protocols. And/or at what point might we need to reconsider moving worship outside. The Reopening committee has been asked to keep an eye on the situation and meet sometime in late August. **Note:** We will hold two worship services at First Congregational in early September before Council meets.

August 28, 2021, 1 - 3 p.m. Memorial Mary P. Larson Seney at Valley Springs Sportsman Club 65 Valley Rd. North Grosvenordale, CT 06255 family is asking congregational for baked goods (cookies, bars, cupcakes, etc.) for reception. Kathy Packard coordinating.

Oct 23 at 11am, Memorial for Rick Amato Does anyone know of Rick? His Daughter Heather contacted me. His obituary is online <https://smithandwalkerfh.com/tribute/details/7648/Richard-Amato/obituary.html>

C. July 18 Future of Faith Formation and Music Conversation

On July 18, we held a second hour conversation regarding the future of faith formation and music. Twenty-five people attended.

Overall, the energy was positive and hopeful. People want to find ways to involve the participation of congregants no matter how young or old, or how traditional or eclectic their faith and spirituality. We heard that many long for Bible Studies, and the need to think more holistically about spiritual growth/faith formation. In addition, we recognized the strong link between music, worship, and spiritual growth and that becoming more intentional about intergenerational worship has a direct impact on the shape, structure, and content of worship, as well on the skills and needs of the music minister/director.

The meeting has given birth to the Creative Worship Planning Team who met for the first time Aug 3 and will meet again on the 17th.

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Other next steps include intentionally planning and experiencing intergenerational worship, forming a team around faith formation like the creative worship planning team, scheduling a second hour for Debby and Christina to share their Super Saturday presentation, connecting with, and having more focused conversation with families.

D. Creative worship planning team

Since arriving, I have been trying to create a team who will work with me and Leilani to think creatively about worship. The team reimagines the "Music Committee." The team is open to all who have a passion for exploring, crafting, and celebrating meaningful, spiritually grounded worship.

The team is currently drafting:

- The team is working out its purpose, goals, and guiding principles, i.e., the first three big questions that are part of the Community Framework.
- A series of short surveys to better understand the hopes and needs of the congregation. The first survey will focus on the songs, music and hymns that inspires, brings joy, and nurtures faith.
- A draft job description for the music minister/choir director. Once drafted this will be shared with Council, Trustees, congregants, who will be asked to provide their comments and thoughts.
- Potential music, creative liturgy components, song leaders, and experiential activities for the fall through advent.

E. Approach for recruiting music minister / choir director

In the June Pastor's Report, I shared the following:

It is time to begin the conversation regarding how we identify and recruit a music minister/choir director. What has been effective elsewhere is to:

- *Poll the congregation, choir, and other musically gifted persons to identify hopes and needs.*
- *Updating the job description and posting the opening in several places, including the UCC job – board, local media, indeed, and our website.*
- *Forming a small team representing diverse voices to agree to must have and nice to have criteria; screen applicants; interview candidates and come to consensus on finalist.*

Trustees have indicated that they are willing to assist as needed, however recognize that the trustees may not be the best individuals to evaluate the needs of the position or conduct the interviews. The Trustees encourage following the model for how Lisa Haupt was hired, where a team led by a knowledgeable leader crafts the description, recruit and vet candidates, and extends the offer.

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With Council's blessing, I would like to follow the following approach:

- Form the search team of 3 or 4 people plus the pastor who represent diverse perspectives regarding worship and music, e.g., choir experience, FCCW tradition, Creative Worship, families, youth, etc.
- Draft a Job Description and seek comments
 - Circulate to council, trustees, former choir members, current musicians/song leaders, and the congregation
- Post the position on Indeed, SNEUCC, local colleges and universities, and elsewhere
- Use congregant feedback to create screening questions and an interview process, e.g., identify must have and nice to have skills, two or three levels of interview (initial, mock rehearsal, and final)
- Clarify final decision process and approvals with Trustees and Council.

F. Beginning the conversation around structure

How might we best organize to provide just enough structure, e.g., governance, to effectively serve those we serve in ministry and to be good stewards of time, finances, relationships, talents, etc.?

Several congregations, UCC included, are moving away from the separate board and committee model. Instead they are embracing team ministry and a unified board which oversees the fiduciary functions of the congregation, e.g., finance, risk, strategy, and entrust teams to make decisions that relate to their areas of ministry.

The advantages of such models include the elimination of named committees in the by-laws, which are increasingly difficult to staff; greater emphasis on mission and ministry activity; clearer accountability and responsibility; faster decision making; and more engaged congregants.

Although it is not an attractive or even exciting topic, structure can facilitate as well as unintentionally inhibit participation, engagement, conversation, and ministry. Our decision processes are also an embodiment of our values and beliefs, e.g., love, trust, justice, etc. In addition, as our context and the congregation evolve, it is helpful to step back from time to time and wonder if there might be other ways to organize to better serve those we serve in ministry.

What are some of the advantages of our current structure? What are some of the challenges? What might some alternative ways of structuring things look like? Another way to think about this is, if we just starting this congregation today, would we create a structure that looks like ours does? Why or why not? How would you structure things differently?