

Mini-History: Leadership and Change

Presented February 22, 2015 by Elizabeth LaPorte

My name is Elizabeth LaPorte and I serve this Congregation as Past President of your Board of Trustees.

Our Congregation has been guided by a number of dynamic ministers and lay leaders. In reviewing the transition between Reverend Phifer and Reverend Geisenhainer, I was particularly interested in the period from 2005 to 2008. At the time Reverend Phifer retired in 2005, it was clear to lay leaders that there was a need for more professional staff to support the growing Congregation.



In 2006, Interim Minister, Barbara Child, and lay leaders initiated the Sankofa Project to identify the strengths, clarify the mission and better understand the needs of our Congregation in preparation for calling a new Senior Minister. The mythical Sankofa Bird is said to fly forward while facing backward -- symbolizing the process of gathering information about our past to inform the future of our Congregation.

In our Congregation, the process of inclusion is more important than the outcome. And the Sankofa Project ensured that as many people as possible were engaged in documenting what was most valuable about UUAA. A "Sankofa Squad" of lay leaders was formed to reach more than 300 members. By the summer of 2006, more than 20 lay leaders developed the final analysis of the input from congregants.

The Sankofa Project provided critical material for the Ministerial Search Committee to clarify the type of ministry we wanted, in alignment with the vision and goals of our Congregation.

From 2006 to 2007, our lay leaders began to put the new vision of the Congregation into action. In 2007, we had a Task Force on Governance to assist the Board with learning about policy governance, which was gaining popularity among other UU Congregations in the nation. The Board developed a timeline to change our guiding documents "to make them consistent with policy governance." According to the November 2007 Minutes of the Board "Tim [Richards] noted that with policy governance, it is really important for the Board to focus on the values of the Congregation, [and] to make sure that we live our values."

Now, we shift to 2008. By February, new Ends Statements were drafted. By March, changes to the Bylaws were drafted. And on June 3, 2008, The Congregation voted to change the Bylaws, approving the shift to policy governance.

The Bylaws describe the roles and responsibilities of the Congregation, the Senior Minister/CEO, and the Board of Trustees. As part of this change to policy governance, the Congregation made a commitment to support professional staff to

manage the operations of the Congregation, including: Sunday services, pastoral care, spiritual growth and development, and other ministries.

Enter: Reverend Gail Geisenhainer. In August 2008, Reverend Geisenhainer began her new position as Senior Minister, Chief of Staff and Chief Executive Officer of our Congregation. Since 2008, Reverend Geisenhainer and the Board have initiated many efforts to continue implementing policy governance. In fact, some experts believe that it takes about eight years to fully implement significant organizational change.

Recently, someone asked: Who is the leader of UUAA? The Congregation is always the authoritative body of a UU Congregation. Our Congregation owns the assets, elects Board members, calls the Senior Minister, and approves the Bylaws. The Board oversees the assets and the activities of the Senior Minister, develops policies and is accountable to the Congregation. The Senior Minister/CEO is responsible for the day-to-day operations and is accountable to the Board.

It is the shared responsibility of the Senior Minister, the Board ---- And the Congregation ---- to follow our system of governance, which is based on shared leadership and accountability. Our lay leaders help guide the process for bringing the vision of the Congregation to life.

A few key words stood out in my research for this mini-history and they are: Inclusion, Responsibility, Compassion, Respect, Accountability and Transparency.

Yesterday, Reverend Gail said: "Leadership is an opportunity for spiritual growth." It's very true.

I would like to thank all the Board Secretaries who have recorded Meeting Minutes and Don Winsor, who has ensured that we have an archive of Board minutes.

