

UUAA's Reflective Conversations Initiative

Information Sheet

The Purpose of Reflective Conversations (RCs). UUAA's Reflective Conversations Initiative was established several years ago by the Board of Trustees with two major purposes in mind: 1) to gather and make use of reliable, first-hand feedback about how congregants experience our various programs and ministries, and 2) to use a process that creates a model for healthy communications within the Congregation.

How Reflective Conversations Work. The method used for RCs is adapted from the book *Completing the Circle* by David R. McMahill. It involves facilitated sharing and discussion by a small group of participants (about 10-12) in a particular ministry or program, based on a set of questions they are asked to reflect upon at the beginning of the RC session. A program leader for the ministry under discussion is present to hear what RC participants have to say and to answer clarifying questions. In this manner, a program or ministry's participants are able to say what they feel needs to be said directly to the person who most needs to hear it. A note taker records individual reflections. Up until now, participants have been chosen at random from congregants active in the programs being considered.

RC sessions last about 1 1/2 hours. Ground rules are based on McMahill's "Habits of Healthy Communication" including: 1) Describe your own experience. 2) Speak from the heart. 3) Listen to understand. 4) Keep negativity in perspective. Each participant is asked to take a few minutes to share their personal responses to the questions they have reflected upon. During this round, other participants listen to understand, and do not respond. A more free form discussion period follows, where participants can relate additional personal experiences and the program leader can answer clarifying questions.

Development and Administration of Reflective Conversations. A Reflective Conversations Team, including one member of the Board who acts as a liaison between the Team and the Board, administers the program. The Board, Senior Minister and program staff work with the Team to identify ministries and programs for which RCs will be held each year. The RC Team collaborates with the appropriate program leaders to develop the questions that will be used for each program's RC(s). The questions are specifically designed to elicit descriptions of participants' personal experiences of the program or ministry being considered. For each RC, one RC Team member acts as the facilitator and another acts as the note taker. Since the inception of the initiative, a number of RCs have been held on the topic of Sunday worship, as well as others dealing with, for example, Interweave, Chalice Circles, stewardship, Chalice Singers, and congregants' experience of the 150th anniversary activities.

What Becomes of the Information Gathered in Reflective Conversations? Participants' responses are made available in writing to the Senior Minister and to the appropriate ministry/program leaders for consideration in moving forward. In addition, session results are synthesized each year in a report to the Board, and are shared with the Congregation in an annual report entry and at a congregational meeting.