

(this was originally an email from Bev Smrha sent to the UU Oakland listserv)

Dear UU Oakland colleagues,

I have been paying lots of attention to the organizational development work that we at UU Oakland have begun. And I thought that some of you might like to be informed about all that we have been doing. So this is a personal statement, from me to you, about what I'm finding so satisfying. I know this email is long, but so much is happening that you should know about.

It took us a while to get moving, but we're now fully engaged with the reflection/deep-analysis/redesign work of transition/interim ministry. For those of you who haven't yet become involved in this lay ministry work, I'd like to briefly give you an overview as a warm invitation to come on in, the water feels just fine.

The Executive Team (ET) has been working with other leadership teams to create a clear/direct document that outlines how and who makes what kind of church decisions, and with whom they collaborate with to do this. At our recent Every Member Ministry (EMM) meeting (all of us are eagerly welcome to attend these) we reviewed a draft and we were all asked to bring the draft document home to the organizational group we are involved with, bring updates to the ET, so we all can get a more detailed understanding of how we work with each other.

And at that same EMM meeting, we were fine tuning a one page document that is so critical to growing our organizational strength and cohesion. It's title is: "FAQ: Decisions at First Unitarian Church of Oakland". It goes on to answer two questions:

- How should decisions be made at our Church?
- How can congregants be involved in decision-making at our Church?

BTW, the abbreviated answer to the first question is "in collaboration and with transparency". Right On!.

I wish more of our community organizations put energy into first coming to widely accepted answers to these questions. Without a basic understanding of our

community values, there is bound to be misunderstandings and hurt feelings. Working collaboratively and with transparency is the bedrock of our community culture. Please let the ET know that you are interested in helping to grow this open culture and would like a copy of the current draft document.

Together the Leadership Development Team (LDT) and the ET are working to clarify our organizational relationships: which Team is doing what work; which other Team(s) do they collaborate with to get that work done. All our church Teams/Committees/Working Groups are involved in gathering and clarifying this information. As we refine the draft working plan further – with all our working Teams participating – we will have a clear understanding of the framework of our organizational connections.

Over the last few years, we have let our attention on our organizational structure lapse. Because of this there is much confusion and untended-to gaps have appeared. We're working to regain our cohesion and thus our strength of empowerment.

I'm sure you are aware of the informational gathering work that the Transition Team has been absorbed with these last months. They have interviewed many groups and Teams; have encouraged us to think about our hopes and fears and then to talk with the Transition Team about all of that. They are coming to a point in time where they will be making a report to the Board. Make sure you speak to a member of the Transition Team very soon.

We have two more Congregational Conversations scheduled: November 30 and December 14. These are wide ranging open conversations where we are asked to voice our thoughts, hopes and concerns to the Board. In the near future, the Board will need to make decisions about the design of our next professional ministry to accompany Rev Jacqueline in the next year or two. Careful notes are taken and the Board really needs to hear our thoughts so they can base their decisions on our collective voice. I strongly urge you to participate in this process. We use simple ground rules and use a facilitator and a process monitor.

While it may not be obvious to some of us at UU Oakland, our church leadership is paying care-filled attention to the essential organizational/developmental issues that are central to our strength as a community organization. This is OUR work; not the work of our clergy/ministers. Rev Jacqueline and Rev Ed and whomever UU Oakland chooses to invite to work with us after this summer, cannot do this work for us. They can guide and help us. But it is up to the congregation, the committed laity, to focus on our developmental issues to design effective tools so that our work together can accomplish our mission.

UU Oakland has a long standing and fierce mission to make a real difference in the world to counter oppression, to help to strengthen a multi-cultural, multi-generational, anti-racist world. In order to work most effectively, we need a strong and fierce community organizational process to support our efforts. You and I can create that organizational framework and do it creatively.

We just need to talk freely with each other and use all our collective skills and passion.

Warmly, Bev Smrha