

Hello, Board of Trustees,

Thank you for this invitation to share with you what is unfolding in Faith Formation. This is an exciting time at TUCW! Our congregation is undergoing a transformation from the old Religious Education model which divides families into upstairs and downstairs tracks to an integrated family ministry and multi-generational faith formation model and culture. I strongly encourage you to read the attached article, *The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation*, by Kim Sweeney. It is important that the board recognizes that the decline of the Religious Education program is not due to some failing in the congregation or leadership. No one is to blame and there are many UU churches across the country that have had similar experiences. The truth is that society has changed since Sunday school was invented and that model no longer serves the needs of our modern families. We are not going to “fix or save” RE. The article explains this in-depth. It can be a shock especially for those whose kids grew up in RE and those who have spent wonderful years of ministry with our children and youth. In no way does the current social climate’s need for new ways of doing things mitigate or cast dispersion on the fabulous programs and wonderful benefits of RE past. If this is all new to you, don’t panic. It’s complex and takes a lot of time and a lot of people to navigate the transition.

So, yes, our “Sunday School” numbers are at a very low point and they will not be restored to the glory days of yore. The congregation no longer has a Director of Religious Education. That role is being phased out. There is a part time person who handles coordination for the curricula and existing volunteers for PreK-3rd grades. It was intended that she also handle 4th-5th grades but that didn’t happen.

Starting in January, I coordinated the implementation of 4th-5th grade OWL, which is self-contained with 2 facilitators and a standard curriculum. The person who was coordinating 6th-7th grades [Crossing Faiths year long program], 8th grade [OWL and COA] and the 9-12th grade Youth Group quit unexpectedly early last Fall. I have been doing my level best to work with the parents and run those programs as scheduled and fill in as coordinator/advisor with the Youth Group in addition to my other responsibilities. This is not meant to be what I spend my time doing. It is a temporary necessity. We will retain the two paid teachers that we have for the small children Pre-K-3rd grade. There will be a skilled part time 15 hour per week person to coordinate volunteers and classes for the Pre-K through 8th grade children. This is all the paid help we can afford at present. Emphasis for that staff will be on our strongest curricula OWL, Coming of Age, and Crossing Faiths for the 4th-8th grade classes. The Youth Group will need my help to organize some dedicated lay leaders to work with them and coordinate that program next year. I will continue to support and organize youth involvement in the regional UUA youth culture. Family ministry for all ages will be developed with a lot of input from our families themselves, and participatory programs for families with school aged kids through 3rd grade will be implemented in the near future. Family Ministry and the specialized curricula for targeted age cohorts will be developed to comprise our Sunday programs in addition to worship for all ages. All of these elements are a part of the larger picture of Faith Formation for the entire congregation.

How in the world do we make all these changes, you may be wondering? We're staging a revolution! A talented group of leaders and committed congregants are joining me and Rev John as the Westport team for Courageous Faith Revolution, [CFR] led by the well-known and highly regarded Kim Sweeney as the consultant

and program facilitator. There are three other UU congregations in the program with us. We are all learning together. CFR began last October and runs for 2 years. Not only do I need a TUCW team to work with, but the whole congregation needs support and guidance from folks in other UU churches who are doing similar things and may be ahead of us with these kinds of changes. I strongly encourage you to read the attached document that details the CFR program and why it is a vital living structure within which to undertake this important and large-scale transformation.

All of this hard work will take time and patience and we will learn as we go. Not everything we try will succeed. We don't know what the church will look like when we are well-underway in the change process and beyond. The congregation members themselves, including leadership of course, will have a lot of input and participation as pioneers in this bold adventure.

Faith Formation is the big umbrella term for doing this transformation work as a whole congregation. Adults need lifelong faith formation to continue to grow. My role as Asst. Minister for Faith Formation is to work with the entire congregation, my team, leaders and staff, to cultivate new programming and events including fresh multi-generational ways of exploring and learning about our faith and deeper engagement with spiritual formation and practices that serve the development of our Unitarian Universalist identity and culture. This overlaps with the work the whole worship team will be doing to experiment with adaptive modes of worshipping together that reinforce and root this work in our strengths while building our capacities for embracing change. Our Spring Adult Faith Formation sessions will be this April and May. We have 5 offerings, some of which are workshops, some are classes. All of them are designed to connect people with each

other and our faith. Another round will be scheduled for fall and then winter and spring. I am also working with a group at Meadow Ridge retirement community to develop a group that provides spiritual depth and reflection regarding aging and death.

All of these avenues will be shaped by our goals of attracting younger adults and families and reinvigorating our entire membership while creating a vibrant TUCW for the future that will be relevant and sustainable in the modern era. We will go slowly and encourage lots of discussion and feedback as we go along. In some areas, this will be a long-term process of many years. Adaptive change is never easy and we will need all of our leaders to participate with us to help the congregation.

All told, Faith Formation is about critically reflexive spiritual discernment. It's about our programming and the way we "do church" including the types of experiences that we offer each other. We want each person, couple and family to have opportunities for connection and UU spiritual growth and development. Faith Formation also plays a role in addressing the bigger picture of the church as an institution. Slowly in due course, ministry, governance and leadership teams are investigating the social experiment that is TUCW. For instance, right now, we are exploring the role that our physical plant plays in the life of the community and what it means to be responsible moral owners of the institution while serving the congregation within. Many other questions can be viewed with this Faith Formation lens. What kind of faith community are we building and modeling together? Is it working for us? If so, how? If not why not? Who are we as Unitarian Universalists in Westport? Why are we here? How do we interpret our engagement with our wider community? Are we serving the way that we hope to serve? What is

the impact? How do we adaptively engage the really big challenges that are coming forward within Unitarian Universalism nationwide and within our national and global communities? Is what we are doing meeting our needs and keeping us relevant and sustainable all at the same time? Things that make you go hmmm.

There is an endless list of systems and ideologies that are broken and no longer serve an increasingly diverse society. We call them social justice issues for short. Racism, sexism, poverty, economic injustice, climate change, immigration, to name a few. Make no mistake. They are not all “out there” beyond the walls of our congregation waiting for us to show up in yellow shirts and advocate for other people to change their hearts and minds. We are part and parcel of the dominant culture for better and for worse. We are at a momentous crossroads as a people of faith. How counter-cultural do we really want to be? What are the boundary conditions that regulate our capacity to transform ourselves and our institution into a better and better approximation of beloved community? The tension between our inner work and our outer commitments to serve the greater good begins to be resolved when we integrate them as mutually supportive aspects of our faith formation.

Please feel free to reach out individually with questions, concerns, comments, advice, wisdom, humor, or just to get a cup of coffee.

Yours in faith,

Rev Shelly

And here are the numbers you asked to see.

Enrollment PreK-8th Grades 2018-2019

Based on class rosters and attendance records,

Pre-K-1st Grade 10

2nd-3rd Grades 19

4th-5th Grades 14 [3 don't belong to the church]

6th-7th Grades 14

8th Grade 9

= 66 children

Avg. Attendance Pre K-8th Grades

Fall Sept.-Dec. 2018 58%

Winter/Spring Jan.-March 2019 68%

Number of adult volunteers for PreK-8th Grades = 28

PreK-1st and 2nd-3rd grades

We have 2 paid teachers for these grades. Each of those classrooms has 1-2 additional volunteer adults present in each session.

4th-5th Grades

Fall: the 2-3 adult rule was followed

Spring: the kids are in OWL with the same 2 trained facilitators each session. All of the parents participate through homework and parent meetings.

6th-7th Grades

Participating in Crossing Faiths year-long curriculum. There are 2 parent coordinators and most of the other parents help with the field trips and Sunday sessions.

Youth Group

There are approximately 10-15 youth who attend at least once in a while with a core and an average Sunday attendance at youth group of 4-6 youth.

Youth Advisor/Volunteers = 9

These folks provide the 2 adult supervisors for each youth group meeting. I am the current de facto Youth Advisor, who is responsible for the youth when attending cons and helping them stay coordinated and moving forward and ensuring that they are able to participate in as many of the normal Westport events and regional cons as possible.

We have had one **family event**, the stewardship pot luck and game night. It was very well-attended and inspires confidence that additional connection opportunities for families and all ages will be well-received.