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Final Report - UUCC Group Relations Workshop

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The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia (UUCC) has experienced a period of painful discord over the past several years. The UUCC Board of Trustees (Board), as part of their response to this discord, chartered a Trust and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) to analyze the various conflicts, and recommend approaches to improve interactions and address conflicts in a constructive manner.

After the TRC diagnosis and analysis, the TRC recommended several actions, one of which included planning and holding an expertly facilitated large group workshop to:

- Build understanding and cooperation, which is a prerequisite to strengthening trust
- Generate ideas and enthusiasm toward improving intergroup relations within the congregation
- Develop a strategy for how to move forward together as a community on areas of common interest

The Board then chartered the GRW committee to plan, conduct a search for a facilitator, and work with the facilitator(s) to implement the recommended workshop. The GRW committee selected Generative Consulting LLC and their team of Brian Bloch and William Tansey to conduct an Appreciative Inquiry workshop and to create a conflict resolution framework to achieve the Goals and Objectives listed below.

Project Scope

The scope, goals, and objectives of this project were:

1. To facilitate a large group Appreciative Inquiry workshop that meets the goals and objectives stated below.
2. To create a conflict resolution framework for addressing future conflicts at UUCC.

Goals:

1. Strengthen trust within interpersonal and intergroup relationships
2. Strengthen trust in UUCC leadership approaches
3. Build strategies for moving forward together as a community of faith that includes identified mechanisms to address conflict

Objectives:

1. Improve intergroup understanding across perspectives through an agreed list of actions for the congregation to undertake to enhance communication, build trust, and improve relationships in multiple contexts
2. Define actions that will engender confidence in UUCC management approaches
3. Define actions for improving congregational communications
4. Develop recommendations on a systemic approach to resolving conflict as it arises
5. Identify and define what the congregation considers successful markers of progress as UUCC moves forward

Data Collection

We started the process by collecting information *via* 62 virtual & in-person interviews (using these questions - [LINK HERE](#)). In consultation with the GRW these interviews included the Minister; past and present members of the Board; and past and present Staff and members of the congregation carefully chosen to represent the spectrum of views. These interviews took place between 3/27/22 and 5/13/22.

Data Analysis

The following is a step-by-step outline of what we did with the data:

1. Reviewed all comments from the interviews
2. Cut data to ensure anonymity
3. Themed data across interviews
4. Generated a Summary Report of all data collected ([LINK HERE](#))
5. Reviewed the Summary Report with the GRW, Rev. Paige Getty, the Board
6. Shared the Summary Report with the UUCC Congregation

After collating the data from all the groups above, we analyzed the data through different lenses to explore the ideal intervention approach:

1. Appreciative Inquiry
2. Burke-Litwin Theory
3. Triangle of Satisfaction

4. Trauma-Informed Community Dialogue
5. Reina’s Trust Building Model

Upon viewing and theming the data collected through these theoretical lenses – we confirmed our initial recommendation to use the Appreciative Inquiry approach. There are multiple reasons why Appreciative Inquiry was confirmed as the best approach and a few of the more compelling are:

1. Appreciative Inquiry is a forward-looking approach that helps to shift the focus from the problem to what we want more of.
2. The Appreciative Inquiry process is designed to help participants shift from the head into the heart.
3. Typically, one of the outputs of the Appreciative Inquiry approach is enabling action groups that work together on something meaningful and in many cases over the years, we have seen that this helps groups and individuals work through problems. This was supported by a theme that emerged during our interviews, that UUCU members felt most appreciated at UUCU when they worked together on something.
4. It became apparent during our interview process that some UUCU members were “stuck” in the conflict and that addressing it head on initially would not be the best approach.

We then discussed the basis of our recommendation with the GRW, and together we decided to proceed with Appreciative Inquiry accompanied by other conflict resolution processes:

Date	Activity	Participants
5/1/2022	Visit & Invitation	UUCU Sunday Service Attendees
5/21-22/2022	Appreciative Inquiry Summit	Attended by 122 Congregants
6/21/2022	Conflict Resolution - Fishbowl	80 participants (30 in-person & 50 virtual)
TBD	Conflict Resolution Framework	TBD

Intervention Highlights

Appreciative Inquiry Summit

Appreciative Inquiry is a four phased approach that is very forward looking and encourages participants to flip the problem(s) to what they want more of. This approach reflects on the best of the past and identifies strengths, which leads to finding creative ways to build on these strengths to create a vision of the future with enabling actions for making that vision come to life.

1. Discovery

- **Step 1 Interview Process** - within this step, all participants broke into dyads / trios and helped each other explore when they felt empowered, the greatest sense of belonging, their hopes for UUCC, and what actions could be taken together to build trust.
 - Discovery Interview Process Template: ([LINK HERE](#))
- **Step 2 Theming Exercise** - all participants combined with two other groups to identify highpoints and themes from the interview process.
 - Theme Exercise Template: ([LINK HERE](#))
 - Mural Design Workshop Output: ([LINK HERE](#))

2. Dream

Groups of five to six worked together to dream of the most desirable future for UUCC. They developed and shared creative presentations (songs, skits, collages, etc.), as well as drafted possibility statements for the future of UUCC.

- Dream Exercise Template: ([LINK HERE](#))
- Dream Possibility Statements Themed Workshop Output : ([LINK HERE](#))
- Creative Presentation Recording Workshop Output: ([LINK HERE](#))

3. Design

Participants proposed enabling actions to bring to life the desired future that emerged during the Discovery and Dream steps. Participants then self-selected the enabling action they were inspired to work on and worked together to develop a vision statement for their enabling action.

- Enabling Action Team List - Updated 7/15/22: ([LINK HERE](#))
- Enabling Action Vision Statement Exercise Template: ([LINK HERE](#))

4. Destiny

participants continued to work on the enabling action of their choice and took the first steps in developing a team to make this enabling action come to life.

- Enabling Action Team Building Exercise Template: ([LINK HERE](#))

The June 21st Conflict Resolution Meeting

During the Appreciative Inquiry Summit, although attendees demonstrated significant enthusiastic commitment in participation and forward-looking input, there were, nonetheless, multiple comments about the need to still address the past conflicts. After much discussion with the GRW, and recognition of the frequent comments related to conflict resolution, we decided that in addition to the Appreciative Inquiry Summit, we should directly address the conflicts that were highlighted in the TRC report and that had been going on for several years. There were also discussions with Reverend Getty who agreed to participate in a Conflict Resolution event. Many considerations were discussed with the GRW as we planned this event:

- Should it be before or after the AI Summit?

- Should it be in person or virtual?
- Should we just have anyone who wants to come, or should we select representatives?
- Would we get a balanced turnout?
- How much time can people allocate for such a process?
- When should it be?
- What process of facilitation should be used?
- What would Reverend Paige Getty's role be in the meeting?
- And very importantly... what is the desired outcome? Reconciliation? Giving Members a chance to explain their concerns and views to promote their feeling heard? Increased empathy?

We decided on a three hour “Fishbowl” facilitation method with members both in the room and on Zoom. Approximately 80 people participated.

As facilitators, we faced several challenges:

1. Three hours is a short amount of time for a conflict resolution discussion
2. Because of the very sensitive nature of the topic, we did not feel comfortable re-focusing the conversation when people went off topic. Therefore, the discussion was often disjointed, bouncing from one topic to the next. The speakers were often intent on using their time to express their concern regardless of what the previous person said. Still, giving people this chance to speak their truth was one of the main goals of the evening. That goal was achieved.
3. There were some tense moments. That is not unusual, but again, we felt that if the facilitator were to intercede, parties would have resented that interference, some vehemently.
4. We felt that key attendees representing the spectrum of opinions came with their minds already made up. There was some attentive listening, but in the end those key attendees did not feel the inspiration to come to an agreement all could live with on any particular issues. While we love to aim for the classic “win/win” agreements, a fallback position is that the parties agree to something “all can live with”- some felt that even this fallback hope was not achieved. The consequence was that we did not fully achieve the desired result. To address this reality, we strongly suggest the below “Suggestions and Next Steps” be implemented *post haste*.

Systemic Approach to Resolving Conflict—Setting Up a Conflict Resolution Framework

The GRW's Request for Proposal (RFP) stated (under Objectives): “Develop recommendations on a systemic approach to resolving conflict as it arises.”

To address that objective, we recommend setting up an Ombuds Program. Ombuds are proven to help organizations, including Faith-Based Organizations, deal with conflicts early and effectively. UUCS members will be able to talk to a UUCS Ombuds in full confidentiality (outside the rare exception of imminent risk of serious harm to self or others) about any concern or question they may have. The

Ombuds will listen and help the member consider the options available for finding a satisfactory outcome. We will train a group of UUCC members to be organizational ombuds as per the Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association ([https://ioa.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/SOP-COE/IOA Standards of Practice English.pdf](https://ioa.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/SOP-COE/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_English.pdf)).

A complement to the ombuds program will be establishing a small cadre of mediators and facilitators. It is our understanding that both exist in the UUCC congregation, and we hope they can volunteer their services if/when the need arises.

Finally, the GRW, with input and guidance from us, will develop and provide a proposed UUCC Ombuds Program Charter to share with the Board and the Executive Team, with the recommendation that UUCC adopt the Charter and support an Ombuds Program.

Suggestions and Next Steps

The suggestions and next steps are based on what was achieved and what came to the forefront during the Appreciative Inquiry Workshop and Fishbowl Process.

- Enabling Action Support Team
 - One outcome of the GRW Workshop was the positive energy from the creation of the Enabling Action Teams. It is paramount to capitalize on this energy.
 - Leadership should formally create an Enabling Action Support Team. The Support Team acts to positively and passionately encourage the Enabling Action teams to self-manage and hold themselves accountable for their own success. Specifically, the Support Team encourages the Enabling Action teams to:
 - seek greater input from other stakeholders
 - seek greater knowledge and awareness about what is happening at UUCC in relation to their Enabling Action
 - think big (creatively with an eye toward the future)
 - Enabling Action Team List - Updated 7/15/22: ([LINK HERE](#))
- The Role of Leadership
 - The Minister and the Board should brainstorm whether there are any adjustments to their approaches that they can make which would both attract and continue to fully support members of the marginalized community, while addressing some of the concerns that have been raised by the 4PG and others. Are the positions totally mutually exclusive? Is there any room for a compromise? That is not for us, as facilitators to say. But, if UUCC wishes to fulfill the bullet points from the TRC (quoted above on page 1), every effort should be made to see if that is possible.
- Intention vs. Impact

- All members, but especially those who have concerns with some of Leadership’s processes, should consider the validity of the “impact vis-à-vis intention” concerns that were voiced in the Fishbowl meeting.
- Members should consider whether there are any adjustments to their own approaches which, without sacrificing principles, can better empathize with others and ameliorate the impact of their actions on others, especially the marginalized members of UUCC and beyond.
- Annual Appreciative Inquiry
 - To build on the work started in the first appreciative inquiry process and assist in rebuilding trust and identifying meaningful ways to work together as a community, convene a congregation-wide Appreciative Inquiry Summit annually.
- Covenant of Right Relations adopted by congregation and leadership
 - Fully support the next stages of the CRR process.
- Conflict Resolution Framework
 - Establish an Ombuds Program, as described in the draft framework.
 - Identify and recruit 2-4 UUCC members with mediation and facilitation skills
- Follow Ted Lasso’s advice: “Be curious not judgmental”!
 - How do we have hard conversations in meaningful and generative ways?
 - How do we create new patterns, approaching each other with curiosity and suspending judgment?
- Finding a common understanding on UUCC governance
 - This is an outstanding issue that came up in our interview process and Fishbowl process.
 - Support the efforts of the “Congregational Participation in Governance” EA team.
- All UUCC members give each other a break.
 - What is being discussed in UUCC is a conversation happening in many “liberal” settings throughout North America. It can help to remember this, and that in most cases, people are not finding easy solutions.

Closing Appreciations

Thank you for letting us participate in this meaningful process and for trusting us to work with you. We learned a great deal about UUCC, your work, and who you are. We were inspired by the strong commitment of UUCC leadership and congregants and the tremendous effort each person we worked with put forth to assist at every step of the way. It was such a clear indication of how much UUCC congregants care about UUCC.



The GRW committee deserves a special thanks. They put in a tremendous amount of work to support all the key steps leading to the GRW workshop and the conflict resolution process. Despite differences of opinion, they worked together in an exemplary way, and it was truly a pleasure to work with this dedicated and sincere team!

Additional Resources

- 1. Appreciative Inquiry Workshop PowerPoint Links**
 - a. Day 1: ([LINK HERE](#))
 - b. Day 2: ([LINK HERE](#))
- 2. Full Destiny Exercise to assist Enabling Action Team Building - ([LINK HERE](#))**