

CommUnity article for February 2022

By Marg Walker, on behalf of the Ministerial Search Team:

Avi Viswanathan, Betsy Hearn, Mary Baremore, Pauline Eichten, Morgan France-Ramirez, Dan Huelster, Lia Rivamonte, and Jake Rueter

You may be among the nearly 300 people who participated in the congregational listening sessions and focus groups hosted by the Ministerial Search Team last fall. But did you know that we also hosted several listening sessions with staff? We wanted to learn about the different areas of work that keep church life going, so that we can faithfully represent the complexity of Unity Church to ministerial applicants. We also wanted to hear about what staff have been through in this turbulent pandemic era from which we are still slowly emerging. So we asked the question we also had posed to the congregation: *For a year and a half, the building was closed but church was open. What would you like to tell us about your experience during that time?* Here are a few of the things we learned.

Almost nothing stopped, and almost everything got harder. Staff all had to learn new skills - things they never signed up for. They immediately had to figure out how to make programs and worship services available on-line, and while we could choose to opt out or stay home, they were the essential workers who had to deliver. It was a constant scramble, at a time when they, too, were going through a lot personally with the pandemic. It was discouraging to occasionally hear from us when we were disappointed or felt disconnected despite their efforts. But they never gave up on us. The urgency to serve the congregation was always the foremost concern.

Some things were transformed in a very good direction. The pandemic jump-started technology improvements that had been on the back burner for some time. Communication and audio upgrades, tech-assisted work sharing, online giving, and other innovations will serve the church well for years to come. New efficiencies were realized. They learned to cover for each other's jobs to a greater extent, and to continue to work as a team remotely. Staff was able to really tend to the building, making improvements and upgrades that are hard to accomplish when the building is in full use.

It was a time of consequential learning. One thing staff learned is that authentic church really can happen via technology - not only meaningful worship, but new ways to produce music, new and innovative programs, and creative opportunities to forge and deepen relationships. Another is that Unity has evolved over time into a pace of church life that is extraordinarily demanding - it might be wise to take stock of what is reasonable to expect. Most important, staff became more intimately aware that as they fulfill their role in keeping the engines stoked and running, they are also engaged in the work of ministry.

By hosting these meetings, MST learned something, too: this staff is extraordinary. Yes, we already knew that. But in some ways, we were like the child coming home from school to find a snack available and dinner on the way, a place to hang our coat, the furnace functioning –

reliable routines grounded in family love. Guess what? Staff loves their work, and this church – and that means, by implication, all of us. Let's not forget to tell them we love them back.