

MINISTERIAL SEARCH TEAM

A Conversation with Angela Wilcox, MST Chair

This month's newsletter update from the Ministerial Search Team (MST) is presented from a different perspective — Taylor Burr, a long-time member of our congregation, interviewed Angela Wilcox, chair of the 2024 MST.

Taylor: I had the opportunity to sit down with Angela and discuss some of the important lessons that the MST has learned from the fall cottage meetings, and their processes, in their effort to present a candidate to call to our congregation, and who will call us. Here are some of the key takeaways from our conversation.

Can you tell us about the ministerial search process?

Angela: We as a congregation and the MST have a process that the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has defined and refined over the years and that every Unitarian Universalist (UU) church follows. As UUs we have much more involvement in that process than many other denominations. We held a retreat with the UUA to take us through their processes. Then we started planning cottage meetings and working on the survey, and as we were doing that we started to write (our) congregational record.

Taylor: *I heard that you had conversations with the last search team to benefit from what they learned.*

Angela: We hosted the active members from the 2000 and 2022 search teams. We had a lovely lunch, shared stories, held our questions in a cottage meeting format with a talking piece and deep listening. We went around the circle tree times, asking:

- What does the search team need to understand?
- What do we need to make sure the congregation understands?
- How do we understand that gap between what the congregation wants and their perceptions of the candidate?

There were some themes that emerged from the previous search teams that echoed what we heard from cottage meetings.

Taylor: Angela also emphasized how much gratitude the '24 MST has for

the two previous search teams' work and wisdom.

The congregation is charged with embracing and transforming conflict as a part of this process, please share more about that.

Angela: Coming up on the first weekend in February, Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley Will be at Unity Church doing a workshop (see page 2) on Saturday, February 2, and as the pulpit guest February 3. Her book *Transforming Conflict: The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil* is a beautiful book about being in a faith community that requires conflict to change and grow.

I really hope people will keep looking for ways to engage even when the search team has gone quiet. January, February and March is the congregation's time to really get comfortable with understanding what calling a minister means to them.

We'll also just keep talking, listening, talking, listening in small groups. All the work in our congregation can happen in conversations between individual people, so let's just keep talking.

Taylor: *Can you speak to your understanding of the upcoming selection?*

Angela: One thing I've learned was how in-depth the process is up to the time of calling the new minister with a vote of confidence. Unlike a democratic political vote, the UUA has stipulated that the MST go through a detailed process to narrow the candidate down to one person so the congregation will move forward with a clear message of unity.

At the MST lunch, someone framed it as an affirmation of our faith in our church. It is a leap of faith that we believe that our church works and that we can work with this minister who has come here.

Hopefully the minister is learning from us as we are learning from the minister



and that is what being in covenant with each other means. We're such a diverse congregation and it's going to be someone for everyone. Right? And if everything is not there, it's going to be supplied by the greater team, and we'll figure it out.

Taylor: In our discussion, we covered themes the search team heard in listening sessions, the process in which the search team is involved, including their training with the UUA, interactions with current church leadership, and in discussions with Rev. Keith Kron and Alfonso Wenker. We also discussed the many considerations the team has moving into the broader selection process. More to come from our dedicated team and exciting process!

Note from the MST: Thank you to Taylor for taking the initiative to offer to do an interview. We appreciate your time, talent, and curiosity.

With the work we've done together and the gifts from those who have walked this path before us, we have a shared anxious excitement as we start reviewing candidates. As we start this new year together, we are filled with gratitude to you, the congregation — for your support, fellowship, and for sharing your stories during the changes behind and ahead.

Find information about items mentioned in this article online at unityunitarian.org/ministerial-transition.html.