



MINISTERIAL SEARCH UPDATE

DECEMBER 2020

FROM THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

by the Ministerial Search Committee

As we head into December, the search committee is putting the finishing touches on our work from the last few months. That work has been focused around better understanding the congregation—who we are, who we'd like to become, and who we're looking for to join us on our journey. With that in mind, we wanted to take a few moments to summarize our work and reflect back to you on what we've heard.

In September and October, we gathered feedback from all of you via a congregational survey as well as cottage and focus group meetings. The survey was completed by nearly 500 members. We conducted 38 meetings in total, and we heard from approximately 205 adults and 47 children in our CRE classes. A summary of what we heard from both the survey and the meetings is now available on our webpage (<https://fusmadison.org/search>). We encourage you to check out all the information available there.

In November, we brought the Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop to approximately 44 participants on Saturday, November 14, and the Rev. Keith Kron shared our pulpit on Sunday followed by an extended coffee hour with members. If you weren't able to attend this workshop, talk to someone who did! You can also read case studies—scenarios that have occurred in other UU congregations—shared during the workshop on the search committee's webpage.

Finally, we compiled the congregational record that will be shared with candidates. This record was heavily informed by what we heard in the congregational survey and the cottage meetings, so read those summaries to get all the details! Here are some of the biggest themes we heard and reported:

- We seek unity and a common purpose. Our large congregation can feel fragmented and siloed. We'd like to break down those silos to work more collaboratively together.
- We know that many among us prefer intellectual sermons, many prefer emotional or spiritual sermons, and many like both. We refer to this as head vs. heart, and we hope our new minister will help us balance both of these perspectives.

- This is a welcoming community. It can also be difficult to develop a deep sense of belonging here. One person summarized this by saying "FUS is a welcoming place where it's hard to find a friend."
- We're conscious that the demographics of our congregation are primarily white, highly educated, and older. That being said, survey results show us that some members of our congregation do not fit these categories, and we want to make space for all when we define ourselves.
- We're very proud of our strong music and CRE programs!
- We're committed to social justice (especially environmental and racial justice), and we'd like to engage more with our broader Madison community in these areas.
- We're aware that a consumerist mindset is prevalent in our congregation. We'd like to see our congregation continue to grow in membership, engagement, and financial contributions.
- We love and value our staff and Rev. Kelly! We'd like to see our new minister work collaboratively with the existing team.

In January, we will begin the interview process with candidates. In order to keep confidentiality, we won't be able to tell you anything about the ministers we're talking with until we have a final candidate for you to meet in April. For this reason, you'll likely hear less from us in the coming months. Please know that everything we've heard from you will be the basis for our conversations with candidates. We couldn't do it without you!

Thank you for your support in this important work!

UPDATED MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS

by *Monica Nolan, Executive Director, Rev. Kelly Crocker, Minister of Congregational Life, & Rev. Roger Bertschhausen, Interim Minister*

Members are the heart of who we are as a community. Our strength lies in this personal and collective commitment to growing, sharing, and becoming a community rooted in the values of Unitarian Universalism. The formal act of signing the membership book is much like other formal covenants we make throughout our lives. It is this gift of covenantal membership that continues to sustain the First Unitarian Society of Madison.

Last September, the Board of Trustees and the staff began the process of updating our membership roster to determine eligible voting members as outlined in our bylaws. We have been remiss in conducting this undertaking over the last four years. So, this year when approaching the project, we were clear that we wanted to center relationships and community support while also delivering the administrative function of holding accurate membership rolls. Other objectives included:

- Providing clear information on what membership both requires and provides our community, as well as outlining a clear pathway for becoming a member or renewing membership.
- Meaningful re-engagement of both members and affiliates whose official status did not meet bylaw requirements.
- Providing the Search Committee with accurate data on membership before the Congregational Record is submitted.
- Ensuring that we provided ample time and information to our community to retain voting eligibility for voting on our new called minister.
- Updating and confirming contact information so members can access accurate contact information for one another.

The resulting membership number as of November 15, after removing individuals who did not respond to our multiple outreach efforts, was 1023. This number is down from 1345 from our last review in 2016, which was down from 1425 in 2013. We also have 101 affiliates, people who make a pledge to FUS but have not signed the official membership book. This number is down from 250 in 2016. These numbers will ebb and flow throughout the year as inactive members make a donation or pledge, or new members sign the book. Classifications don't

capture the many other individuals that don't engage in these more formal demonstrations of institutional commitment but remain vital, and certainly just as valued, members of our community.

A dip in membership numbers is normal and expected during a time of transition. For those who are connected to FUS primarily through a relationship with one of our ministers, it makes sense that they would struggle to remain connected once that minister leaves. Likewise, we expect an increase in interest and engagement when our new minister arrives. Regardless, there are always new people arriving at our doors who are yearning for community and a spiritual home. In the coming year, and in all the years to come, we will continue working on becoming a community of radical welcome—a relationship rooted in shared growth and belonging.

As we continue, both as a community and as a tradition, to dismantle white supremacy culture, our membership number presents an opportunity to reflect on Dr. Tema Okun's work on the characteristics of this culture. More specifically, we are invited to challenge the characteristic that progress translates as bigger and more and to consider the marker of meaningful relationships as a sign of our strength as a community.

One number alone cannot communicate how impactful and inspiring our community is and can be together. We find that inspiration in your stories, your faces on Zoom coffee hour, your messages of continued connection and engagement with one another, and this community of love, justice, and hope. We, your Leadership Team, believe that our community is not defined by its size but rather by the degree to which we are known to each other, and how we move through our days with the values we hold most dear.

MINISTERIAL MODEL ANNOUNCEMENT

by Terri Pepper, President, & the FUS Board of Trustees

As First Unitarian Society prepares to call a new settled minister in the spring of 2021, many aspects of the work identified for the transitional period of intentional interim ministry are concluding. A primary area of focus during this time has been exploring various approaches to defining roles and areas of responsibility within a multiple-minister team. This exploration has been informed in several ways: reaching out externally to learn from the experiences of other large congregations; seeking feedback from the congregation through discussions and a survey; consulting with denominational resources; reflecting on the working relationships of our ministers and staff during the interim period. Themes that emerged were an emphasis on enabling collaboration, living out our UU values in paid employment and professional ministry, and increasing the sustainability of congregational life for ministers, staff, members, and affiliates.

Broadening the discussion beyond our own congregation and the individual ministers who have served FUS, the Ministerial Research Task Force provided valuable perspectives from other large UU congregations. A key insight from the congregations surveyed is that ministerial roles can change as the needs of the congregation change and the abilities and interests of individual ministers develop over time. There are many ways to define roles within a ministerial team, with varying emphasis on concentrated authority in more hierarchical models to shared authority in more collaborative approaches. There are many ways of allocating responsibility among ministers in any model, and there are tensions, advantages, and challenges in any system. More information about what we heard from other congregations is available in the [recording](#) of the February 2, 2020 parish meeting and in a summary report available on our website at www.fusmadison.org/search.

In survey responses, cottage meetings, and open question discussions the majority of FUS members and friends who provided feedback find value in, and are most comfortable with, a more collaborative, less hierarchical model. Collaboration provides flexibility to adapt to changing needs, encourages creativity in our shared ministry, and enables ministers to work to their individual strengths. Regarding the interim experience in balancing roles, responsibilities, and working intentionally on more collaborative decision

making, Rev. Kelly Crocker reflects, “The collaborative model is allowing us a freedom of innovation and an ability to work with our gifts and strengths.” During the interim period, Rev. Kelly has worked closely with the board, sharing her discernment process for the future of her own ministry and insight from working relationships with Rev. Doug Wadkins and Rev. Roger Bertschhausen.

In addition to the more practical considerations, feedback within and beyond FUS also emphasized the importance of living out our UU values in the working relationships in our congregations. Collaborative decision making and shared authority require attentiveness to defined roles and direct and honest assessment of ongoing working relationships. Strategies and principles to support this work have been gained from both experiences during the interim time and insight from other congregations. Approaching all of the work of ministry through the lens of our UU values also highlights the equal importance of individual components of our congregational life. From Revs. Roger and Kelly, “We also lift up that there is a justice aspect of breaking down the hierarchy, and we appreciate recognizing the value of all pieces of ministry—both the visible pieces of worship and being the face of the congregation, and the unseen pieces of relationship and care.”

Having reviewed this information from many sources, the board has provided this guidance to the Ministerial Search Committee: As we call a new minister to FUS, this will be a ministry of equal standing to Rev. Kelly Crocker with the same level of responsibility and authority. The two ministers will have comparable levels of compensation. Both ministers will report directly to the Board of Trustees and have the title “Minister.” While many aspects of ministry will involve extensive collaboration between the two ministers, each minister will have specific areas of accountability based on their strengths and experience, ensuring that one person is accountable for each piece of our congregation’s ministry. Once the new minister is settled, a written covenant will be developed by the ministers and the board to outline areas of responsibility and their working relationship.

At that time, the ministers may also discuss expanding their titles to better describe their responsibility areas.

We believe this ministry of equal standing or “co-senior” ministers has many advantages and is the best fit for our congregation at this time. As we enter the search process for our next settled minister, this places FUS in a leadership role within the evolving sense of UU values that place a priority on collaborative leadership. We have also heard from the UUA Transitions Office that congregations that have recently adopted collaborative models of

ministry have elicited a high level of interest in open positions.

The board extends our gratitude to all who engaged with this question and provided input. Special thanks to the members of the Ministerial Research Task Force for their diligence in broadening our insight, to the Search Committee, to all who participated in the many feedback sessions, and to our ministers for sharing their own discernment processes to help guide this next phase of our congregation’s shared ministry. We welcome your thoughts and questions at fuspres@gmail.com.

MINISTERIAL COVENANT

by Rev. Roger Bertschhausen, Interim Minister

Ministerial transition is a tender time for a congregation and its ministers. Where there is a continuing relationship between the minister who left their position and the congregation, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Standards of Professional Practice wisely call for a covenant between the current ministers and their predecessor. When I was named Minister Emeritus at the Fox Valley UU Fellowship a few years after I left, my successor followed this call and invited me to work with her and the continuing minister at Fox Valley to create a covenant.

As I said in a sermon earlier this fall, I’m a big believer in covenants. Covenants describe how the parties who enter into them aspire to interact with one another. They help make clear what is embraced within the relationship as well as the boundaries within which the relationship should operate. I find that clarity to be incredibly helpful. Covenants between current and former ministers can help facilitate a long-term, healthy relationship that is of great benefit to the congregation as well as current and former ministers. A strong relationship between an emeritus minister and a congregation’s current ministers can be especially valuable.

I don’t think it’s widely known at FUS that the Rev. Doug Wadkins, the Rev. Kelly Crocker, and the Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler adopted a covenant last year. Since I was not party to it, that covenant ended when Doug left. Literally on my first day on the job here, I contacted Michael and invited him to enter

into a process of creating a new covenant with Kelly and me. I am delighted that he did so and that the three of us have signed a new covenant. I am grateful to Michael and Kelly for working with me on this.

The three of us agree that it will be helpful for you, the congregation, to have access to the covenant so you can also have clarity about the relationship this year. I encourage you to take a look at the covenant which can be found at <https://fusmadison.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ministers-Covenant-20-21.pdf>. You can also see some questions about the covenant in the Q&A at the end of this document. I feel like the covenant will help us take a step forward in our relationship this year as the congregation continues moving toward a settled ministry team in place next August.

The covenant will end when I leave. It will likely take some time next year for the new minister along with Michael and Kelly to create a covenantal understanding for their relationship which will, of course, be for a much longer term. I look forward to watching FUS from afar in the coming years and seeing a strong, vibrant relationship between Michael as Minister Emeritus, Kelly, and the new minister.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

SEARCH UPDATE Q&A

How might candidating work if we are still in virtual mode?

Most likely, FUS will still be in virtual mode when the candidate the Search Committee recommends is introduced to the congregation (likely to be in late April/early May 2021). Candidating Week will culminate with a congregational vote on calling the minister. The good news is that the UUA Transitions Office helped congregations last spring have successful virtual candidating weeks. They had only weeks to figure it out last spring; we have months, and also the wisdom gained last spring.

What does the field of congregations in search look like this year?

UUA Transitions Director Rev. Keith Kron reported that there are around 26 congregations in search this year—quite a bit fewer than usual. He said typically around 70 ministers are in search. FUS is by far the largest congregation in search this cycle. FUS is likely to draw interest from ministers who are not generally in search but are attracted by FUS's size and reputation.

Will the co-ministry model make FUS less attractive to potential candidates?

UUA Transitions Director Keith Kron believes this model will likely make FUS more attractive as more ministers want to work more collaboratively. A few congregations have made this shift in recent years—most notably, Beacon UU Congregation in Summit, NJ, a few years ago, and the UU Church of Annapolis, MD, last year. Keith notes that no candidate told him they wouldn't apply at Annapolis because of the model. Annapolis is particularly interesting because one of the new co-senior ministers served there for many years as the associate minister. You can find the covenant between the co-senior ministers here: <https://www.uuannapolis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Co-Executive-Ministerial-Covenant-08.18.2020.pdf>. We also note that First Universalist Church in Minneapolis, the second largest brick-and-mortar UU congregation in the US, shifted to a co-ministry model a few years after calling an associate minister. The senior minister and the associate minister mutually recommended switching to a co-senior minister model.

Will there be parity in compensation between our co-ministers?

Yes, they will be paid comparably and in accordance with UUA recommended guidelines for senior/lead ministers. This will constitute a large raise for Rev. Kelly who has been underpaid compared to UUA guidelines and will therefore necessitate FUS budgeting more money in 2021-22 for ministry.

The covenant between Rev. Kelly Crocker, Rev. Roger Bertschusen, and Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler has some specificity, but also a lot that is open to interpretation. How will that work?

If any of the signatories have questions about how to interpret something from the covenant, they'll talk to each other about it and come to a shared understanding.

The covenant is between the ministers. What's the role of FUS members?

Yes, the covenant is between the ministers, which is the custom in the UUA—including in the covenant between Rev. Max Gaebler with Michael after Max retired and became Minister Emeritus. We hope that having a covenant and making it available to FUS members will help everyone understand the current parameters of the relationship. That can be helpful in navigating individual relationships with Michael. An important note: the covenant only applies to Michael, not his family.

Where does FUS stand in terms of size in relation to the other top four largest UU congregations?

The virtual Church of the Larger Fellowship is the largest UU congregation (2615 members), All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa (2267), First Universalist in Minneapolis (1064), Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York (1053), FUS (1023), First Unitarian Church of Dallas (1019), and All Souls Church in DC (1000). The UU Church of the Philippines, which is made up of some thirty churches but counted as one by the UUA, has 2500 members.