

First Unitarian Church of Portland

Café Conversation on Transparency

April 2016

Highlights:

What does Transparency mean to you?

- Trust
- Information should be available.
- All deliberations would be shared openly.
- Clear consequences for decisions would be available, Decision making would be participatory
- What decisions are being made and who is making them? How can I influence decisions before they are made?
- All budget line items are available

What would transparency look like at our church?

- The Board and the ET need to embrace transparency.
- Earlier and clearer communication about decisions.
- Electronic communication would be timely.
- Congregation needs to fully understand the role of the Board and its limitations Letters and suggestions would receive responses.
- Take the steps outlined above in meaning of transparency, e.g.
 - provide information about decisions to be made
 - invite input into decisions to be made, -

What is my role in Transparency at First Church?

Show up.

Pay attention.

Ask questions.

Synthesis of All Comments:

Question 1: What does Transparency mean to You?

- Transparency grows out of a relationship where the ET, Board, staff, and congregants [elements on a circle] all work toward a common mission ["mission" in the center]
 - "no secrets"
- Financial detail is visible
- Watching how polices are made
- Required trust
 - Congregants - Board / staff [is] primary
 - Open communication - goes both ways
 - Genuine concern no personal agendas
 - Staff and Board acting in the best interest of congregants
 - Not concealing

- Mission level
 - Policy
 - Tactical - Accountability
 - Concise communications
 - Annual Report - QUUF example
 - Annual Meeting
 - People who are making the decisions gather info from all sources.
 - Anybody knows where to go to get all the answers. Ombudsman - One source to direct questions and concerns.
 - Executive Team and Board would be willing to share all deliberations openly.
 - Trust - transparency is not there because the trust isn't there. These go hand in hand.
 - Information should be available even if not every congregant is interested
 - Programs visibly available - website and elsewhere. Action by board: create a membership booklet on how to navigate the church
 - Clear lines of decision-making
 - Knowing what to ask for
 - Clear descriptions of consequences for decisions
 - Participatory decision making, when possible
 - Need for democracy. Action by board: Explain our process clearly and share Annual Report in meeting setting.
 - What happened to the annual meeting
 - Transparency is needed in a large organization. Characteristics
 - Desired information is easy to get - electronic and not
 - Avenues are needed for those who want it when they want it
 - Deliberate [conscientious] execution of policy based governance.
 - Transparency = policy based governance (if done well)
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- Five (5) "W's" [who what where when why (?)]
 - How do I find out the Board's Agenda - Action by board: Advertise in various ways the Board meetings and agenda, currently found on board web-page.
 - Take part
 - What decisions are being made, who is making them, what criteria are being used. How do I interact?
 - How do I influence decisions before they are made (or afterwards via appeal process)? Examples:
 - Sextons and union (Why was this a surprise?)
 - Choir fees
 - What is policy based governance (PBG), what is relationship of Board, Congregation, and Ministers (Executive Team, ET).
 - Sure I am being heard - Board and ET are listening. Action by board: Create more times to meet and share with congregants.
 - Opposite of secret. Not understanding why decisions are made
 - Response to letters
 - Have info about all Board & ET decisions. e.g.: policy, budget admin issues
 - All budget line items

- ET reports to Board/Board reports to congregation
- More information should be given when major changes happen at church. This applies to MAJOR and BIG decisions should be the focus union issues, Buchan BLG debt Another issue – new choir director earlier sharing of approach etc. Seems info came rather late
- Transparency= quantity of info want input early. Messaging needs to be thoughtful and informative-feel inclusive. Don't avoid hard issues: Example-AFD feels like we avoid making important connections- our mission requires money
- Accountability for our pledging
- Using modern technology to get the word out. Multiple ways to get info to congregants.
- Transparency- sense of ownership in my church. Feeling your opinion is valid
- What is the structure for us to give input and whom do you contact.
- User-friendly info web that is easily accessible
- Transparency means I'm trusted to handle details I don't feel trusted now.
- Transparency means being included on the journey.
- How is money applied to mission? Are all programs in sync with our mission?
- Transparency= feeling connected and valued
- Transparency would be more exact numbers on the pie chart
- Transparency= total and congregants decide

Question 2: What would transparency look like in our church?

- Membership coordinator would lead to transparency (new people get to know organization)
- Improved culture and behaviors of trust
- [Inform congregation] what's under consideration in advance of agendas
 - Respond consistently to congregants letters/ Issues
 - Bring congregants in on discussion issues at an early stage.
- Make [information] easier [to access] -- more available.
 - Trade offs of quantity and quality of information
 - [Example:] Annual reports--
 - No longer comprehensive
 - Budget presentation no longer detailed
- Undertake a Cultural Shift
 - Board and ET need to embrace transparency.
 - [Shift needed because there is now a] disconnect between Sunday services and rest of Church's life
- Published booklet on organization of Church
 - Social justice
 - Membership committee
- Training for Board and Congregants on PBG yearly (basis for transparency)
 - What is transparency? See Church Transparency Project [website](#).
- Salaries of key staff
 - Comply with [IRS Form 990](#)
- Balance of information available and effort required to find it:
 - Prioritization
 - Understandable--multiple levels of detail [provided]
 - Access issues
- Measure outcomes

- Congregation fully understands the role of the Board and limitation of the Board's authority and ability [within PBG] to act
- What does it mean that the congregation is the church? What rights and responsibilities do I have? Expectations, especially for unchurched.
- An understanding of decisions
 - electronic communication - timely
 - contact information available
 - app (like GA app - to know what's happening)
 - how are decisions made
 - who provides input
 - who is the final decision-maker
 - tech committee?
 - user documentation
 - phone number for tech support
- Bill's blog is a big plus in this area
- social justice opportunities in a timely manner
- text updates for time sensitive issues
- Minutes available - more info about where / inboxes in narthex
- Language important e.g.: 'voting' for board = 'ratification'
- Procedure for nominating known
- Democratic = How participate? What vote on?
- Understand PBG - not democratic
- Delegation to ET loses transparency
- Present minutes in story form
- On joining the church some information on governance and guidance on navigation church organizational structure would be useful.
- Having a mentor for new members or visitors with asset of topics to review
- Is there a connection between transparency and welcoming?
- Two-way communication on our website places to make comments and ask questions. Could write needs and congregants to look at those to help and respond
- Continued use of multiple media what is "OK" to be broadly transmitted need to decide ahead of time Clear boundaries
- Expectations example, if asked for money how is it used.
- Clearer and earlier communication about issues
Timeliness is an issue would think this would be important
- Budget would include salaries benefits of all ministers and staff and rational for the job along with description of they jobs they do.
- Want to know what ministers are doing accountability related to job description
- What are fees for all programs?
- Want to know what ministers are doing ex monthly report Want to be linked

Question 3: What is your role in Transparency at First Church?

- How do questions that come up get answered?
 - What is the process - I know the process.

- If you are concerned about an issue, how do you interact, find information, guide others?
- Connecting various communities to the larger whole - see the big picture
- Perceive the ET not want to help not using committees work
- Asking questions when concerned
- What should committees be asked to do, frequent lack of follow through
- Be an enthusiastic supporter of all in church (but you need transparency to do that)
- Own responsibility [take initiative] to examine information released and communicate [views / reactions] to the Board
- Be present / not give up. [Role expressed after summary of a recent frustrating experience with Church staff and leadership regarding the new choir fees charged to non-pledging participants]
- Participate in governance
 - Share in ways where we can contribute [be effective]: skills, talents, gifts
- Endeavor to understand Policy Based Governance
- Trust is built on transparency; transparency breeds trusts
 - Decisions made don't surprise people
 - Ask questions
 - Pay attention
 - Figure out what you need to know.
- Communicate clearly concisely as leaders; willing to take criticism & be accountable
- Know your role
- Human connection
- Speak your truth
- How do humanists become visible in the church?
- Groups' ability to connect with the congregation
- Come to annual meeting and ask questions. (Not worry about quorum) They will come. Give them lunch. This is possible with large congregation.
- Ask for well publicized meetings by Board for input. Show up!
- Don't require that my ideas be implemented.
- Participate in discussion re: mission and will be reflected in budget annually/zero based budget
 - Bring to light best, or alternative, practices
 - Insist on follow up / follow through
 - Become knowledgeable re: church. "Howdol.com" (wisdom)
 - Become mentor-engage
 - Balance transparency with holding / honoring confidences
 - Designated opportunities to discuss sensitive issues
 - Transparency is a stand in for disenchantment
 - [response] Move from infatuation to love

[Darin provided the metaphor that the Church is a lot like a vacuum cleaner without a bag: we are really good at sucking in new congregants but we have nothing to keep them inside]

- Not complaining but voice our needs constructively
- Put more time into being informed if issues come up we need be responsible on sharing information
- Principles of UU apply to all sizes of churches
- Be responsible if hear gossip...verify
- Appreciate volunteers and their work

- Culture of the church and what are your responsibilities work together to find problems and help fix them
- Congregants could step up and help fix needs if know via transparency what they are.
- Dealing responsibly with information. Modeling responsible communication
- Avoid triangulation of issues be more direct and respectful (don't gossip)
- We all take on role of transparency to support the beloved community share and ask questions
- Ask yourself how you're supporting the Beloved Community when difficult issues arise
- We would like members of the executive com. be apart of these types of conversations and we should advocate for that.