

President's Script

INTRODUCTION: Thank you for coming. My plan is to get you out of here no later than 1230pm including a brief Q and A. We will understand if you have to leave. Please note that more info will be provided by Roundups or the Crossroads newsletter.

The GOAL of this Town Hall is to provide the congregation with information about the Ministerial Assessment Process, specific BOD actions with this minister's performance, the Minister's Departure process, and the departure itself in greater detail. We will also leave some time to answer questions, keeping in mind that it is Mother's Day.

First let me re-order this agenda so that the priorities can allow for discussion. We will share the Congregational Meeting process and Budget together as they are very related. Then we will move to the Minister's Departure, followed by a Q & A, as a listening session. However, we don't expect this to be a "Solutioning" session. Ideas for solutions can be shared in other ways. Board recommendations will come from our May 16th Board meeting, and, as always, you are welcome to sit in or zoom in if you like.

1. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING:

On June 2 following service, we will have an agenda that includes: Status of Grant and Feasibility Study and possibilities for a Capital Campaign and a congregational review of the revised budget. Members will be provided with appropriate documents prior to the meeting, as well as voting information and proxy forms. The Membership is strongly encouraged to attend and vote but if you are unable to attend, you can choose a proxy. Members, please see BRUUnet and/or Knowledgebase for details on proxy forms and process or ask a board member.

2. BUDGET:

At the April Town Hall, we heard the congregation regarding the value of our staff, and we listened. We are committed to priority of taking care of our remaining staff, programs and the building. We will consider carefully what cuts are most important in BRUUs best interests. However, we need your voices and participation as we move ahead. The May meeting will allow the Board to discuss a revised budget that would safeguard the staff positions currently held and consider COLA adjustments for each as appropriate.

3. THE MINISTER'S DEPARTURE:

By now, you may have seen the Minister's Farewell Letter, and are ready to hear how this departure came about, including the Ministerial Assessment outcomes and decisions made by the Board. Since we are now able to communicate some details that could not be shared during the past two weeks, we hope this meeting will help the congregation continue to heal, and even allow us to explore better ways of doing things as we move forward.

First, it is necessary for you to know the key elements in hiring, supervising and evaluating a Minister's performance.:

- 1) Job description;

- 2) The Minister's Agreement (our contract with the Minister that details performance requirement, benefits, and departure options);
- 3) The Personnel Manual;
- 4) The BRUU Safety Manual;
- 5) Ministers Code of Conduct (UUMA)
- 6) The Ministerial Assessment that results in the form of a Ministerial Assessment Summary Report (THE REPORT), based on feedback from congregants and staff who serve BRUU routinely interacting with the Minister.

The Ministerial Assessment Team members were chosen for their commitment to process and proven trustworthiness. This team was diligent in using UUA Ministerial Assessment resources and guidelines in its process, which included collaborating with the minister on the tools available and the list of congregants to be contacted for feedback. It was also committed to being fair to all concerned (unbiased surveying, appropriate narrative and data collection, accurate reporting to the Board). This also means that the Ministerial Assessment was based only on performance.

The Ministerial Assessment Process:

We believe that Ministers are entitled, as are our employees, to being fully acknowledged for their strengths and any professional growth seen since the prior evaluation. They are also entitled to be provided the Ministerial Assessment findings, even before the Board is provided the Report. This was done in early March between the Minister and representatives of the Ministerial Assessment Team who shared the narrative feedback from the collaborated list of selected congregants. Basically, it was not good. More on that later.

The Minister was alerted that the March Board meeting would be followed by a CLOSED (or EXECUTIVE SESSION) held for the Board to discuss the REPORT without the Minister's presence (more about that in a minute). The Board would then determine the next course of action and set up a meeting with the Minister. However, because the Team's rep was unavailable to discuss it or answer questions at the March meeting, the same CLOSED SESSION topic was rescheduled for April. The Minister was fully informed of this change. When reminded that they would be excused from attendance in the CLOSED SESSION, the Minister insisted on being present. The UUA document supporting the Board's position was provided to the Minister.

UUA allows Boards of Directors to hold CLOSED SESSIONS whenever they must deal with a Ministerial performance issue that raises high levels of concerns. This standard practice provides an opportunity for the Board to speak freely on options for rehabilitation of troubling behaviors and determine next steps, including dismissal of the minister if necessary. Ministers are told the subject of planned closed sessions in advance, via the agenda and monthly meetings with the President that occur prior to each meeting. For your information, the Board also excuses the presence of our Youth representative as we cannot risk a break in confidentiality until we have full information to provide.

The Ministerial Assessment Summary Report outlined several areas of concern, with 6 out of 8 critical ministerial responsibilities needing change. While the Board wanted to acknowledge the

Minister's strengths in some areas, after much discussion the Board felt that, even with the limited improvements over the past few months, the current situation with one high priority requirement in ministerial duties was unsurmountable.

Most concerning in the Report were behavior issues unbecoming a Minister working with member-volunteers. I do NOT wish to go through each incident reported but be assured each was investigated and discussed with the Minister as they were reported. More disturbing were reports of new incidents brought to our attention right up until the evening before our meeting with the Minister to discuss the Board's recommendations related to the report. Unfortunately, due to power differences between a Minister and any congregant, these were not problems that could be remedied with a Right Relations consultation with UUA.

The President's offers of help and guidance over several months, even as more and new issues continued to surface, were rebuffed. In February when it became apparent that the Minister was not going to accept help in any form and the MA begun in January was moving forward by the book, I decided to let it run its course. Please remember that the assessment process was transparent to the Minister and incorporated the Ministers participation in selections for performance feedback.

The Minister's Agreement offers 3 ways for a Minister to depart from service to a congregation.

- 1) The Minister submits a letter of resignation (voluntary or involuntary) with an effective date.. This process allows the Minister to receive financial compensation for any unused leave, as well as with grace.
- 2) The Minister can be fired by the Congregation for "reason." This requires a Congregational Meeting and usually is seen as an opportunity for folks to take sides. It can tear a congregation apart. I believe there are some possible solutions to this, but timing is usually the obstacle. More on that later.
- 3) The Minister can be offered a Negotiated termination agreement, a sort of middle ground which allows the church to negotiate with UUA assistance an agreement allowing the Minister to receive a severance packaged dictated by the UUA along with other terms on which both Minister and the Board must agree. The Farewell Letter from the Minister was one and there were others. However, this agreement allows us to share the important facts of the departure with others. In fact, the UUA believes it is a church's responsibility to share the reason for having entered into this agreement when we talk to potential interims or those interested in the settled minister position.

The Board struggled with the decision to dismiss. We knew that although we could fire for cause, we would have to have a congregational meeting with notice, and during that lengthy and unwieldy process, it would create divisions in the congregation that would set us back for a long time to come. Ultimately, a congregational meeting would hurt this congregation more than help it. And do we want to be known as the congregation that fires its ministers?

After much discussion, the Board agreed that while dismissal for cause was most suitable, we decided to allow the Minister to choose to either voluntarily resign with limited benefits or accept a negotiated termination agreement for departure which would provide more benefits but allow BRUU to avoid a protracted and painful process for the congregation.

On May 25, three board members, me (as President), Art Muirhead (Program Council Chair) and Rita Romano (Ministerial Assessment Team representative) met with the Minister to present the final Report and answer questions. Accompanied by a UUA Good Officer advocate, the Minister argued points but faced with facts, she declined to comment further. The President then asked for the Minister's resignation in either form (voluntary or under negotiated agreement) to be effective May 10.

Four days later, the Minister selected the Negotiated agreement process. For the past 2 weeks, I have worked with the board's support and involvement and with a UUA representative to complete the process. With the board's approval, I signed the agreement on Thursday late afternoon. Now that that is complete, under the terms of the Minister's Agreement I am free to share this information.

Where are we now? Basically, the Minister is considered to be on Administrative or Terminal Leave until the end of November 2024, receiving monthly paychecks for 6 months covering the salary and benefits of housing, insurance, retirement contributions. It is also agreed that for 2 years, there will be no contact with congregants (except for those currently utilizing the Minister's partner's business services to receive those services).

As we near the end of this presentation, I want you to know that we recognize the difficulty presented to members and other congregants who were not aware of these issues, which frankly seemed to be abrupt in nature and of such intensity as to leave a number of people somewhat stunned and very upset. It took great courage to report these incidents as they occurred or via the assessment. In the long run, I believe it is better to have parted ways in this manner that perhaps will give the Minister time to reflect on their work expectations in Ministry and for us to determine our own expectations for our future.

We look forward to further discussions on how we can better inform the membership of these processes and their role in the assessment itself. NOW is time for **Q and A's.**

This has been a hard road for everyone concerned and the congregation is encouraged to engage in this movement forward for the process of healing and our vision for BRUUs future. I have a lot of people to thank, including congregants and staff who have stepped up beautifully to move us through this difficult time, but have done so privately. You should expect continued communications, either responding to questions and concerns or engaging with you, so we move forward in keeping BRUU a safe place for seeking and service. Thank you.