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| 1. As we regroup after FUSW’s recent challenges, a basic question to ask ourselves is whether we want FUSW to continue. Do you envision a future for FUSW? Do you want to continue being a part of this congregation? |
| * They ask the big one first…
* I want to continue –butt what it will look like? TBD?
* I want to continue as well, but at the same time, we’ve been one foot out. I don’t like Zoom so don’t go, but we don’t have a car, so a big issue to go. We’ve tried another UU closer to us, got a bit involved, but didn’t feel right. Didn’t feel drawn to go back. But don’t know what we can do to move things forward – which is not fair if I am not a part of it (involved). But I still jump in when called.
* Continue? I want to burst into tears. What it was is gone – and so, part of me (of course, its part of my life) feels disloyal if I say no. In its current iteration – NO. I don’t think it can or is sustainable. Did a head count and 66 and younger in the minority. We are dying because we are old. The dozen people keeping it going are fragile because they are aging. There is a thin thread between them and the inevitable. If we don’t join with another congregation, we’re done. We had an opportunity to join with White Plains, and we spit on it, and it was rude. Do I want to stay part – I’m really not sure – honest answer. I’ve pulled back enormously, I’m still involved, but a year from now – I don’t think so.
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| 2. Some have proposed that FUSW merge with another (presumably UU) congregation. Do you like this idea, or would you prefer to see FUSW continue as an independent entity? |
| * Croton is interested in merging. I brought the topic up and they are interested.
* I think it’s a realistic alternative. Some congregations are too far. They have a building and we would be joining THEM. For those of us living in NY, anything between Hastings and Croton is too far. We can’t be there – it doesn’t make me happy. Its not a feasible alternative for a lot of people. As we get older, we are not going to want to go further.
* We will kind of be swallowed up in merging, everything about our community will be swallowed up. Its feasible in that it will allow some FUSW members to have a church home – but not maintaining the specialness of FUSW. We have sought out other congregations when out of town, but never felt welcomed, people would walk past us. We’ve tried at 4th U in NYC – They are nice people and finally one 75-yr old man came to talk to us after 20 minutes. What we think FUSW is for us – I don’t think we can maintain it. I don’t think merging with another congregation is best for us. However wonderful Croton might be…
* Its not a merger, it’s an acquisition.
* They are in a similar situation to us in Croton – it is not viable in their current building. For members of our congregation who live north, the middle of the county may not be bad.
* When you think of children coming back for Christmas services, they think of OJA. They want to see people their age – or they are not coming.
* If both congregations merged, Croton would be in the majority, and if they have young parents and children, they have a wider diversity. But both congregations would have attrition.
* White Plains has lost about half of their congregation. They used to have about 300 people – now about 125-ish (but don’t quote me) . What would happen if Croton and FUSW streamed into their space? Everyone would have to give a little somehow. White Plains is losing their ministers.
* Regarding the possibility of all Westchester UU’s merging: Maybe everyone would have to sign a prenup to assure we each got what we needed.
* It’s probably something worth exploring. If all the Westchester congregations merged together, I can see someone from UUA doing a case study. With all our 7 principles working to merge together.
* Mohegan is practically dead - they meet once a month and are lay-led.
* There is some very anti - White Plains, a lot of animosity in our congregation – but it’s time to put on big boy panties and knock it off.
* We’ll have to come up with a new name – how about the ***Last*** Unitarian Society of Westchester.
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| 3. Until the most recent surge in COVID cases, we have been holding services in the chapel of South Church. As the chapel in South Church cannot hold our entire congregation, as South Church meets some, but not all, of our needs, and as our lease at South Church is unlikely to be extended indefinitely, we will need to start actively looking for a new home for FUSW. This would have to be a rented building or space, as we do not have the funds to purchase a property, What qualities (location? configuration?) would you like to see us look for in our next home? |
| * The first thing is usable outdoor space, a visible, yet comfortable location, good parking, and a chapel meeting area that is large and comfortable, and a viable kitchen to cook and use the kitchen. I’m not going to talk about classrooms yet.
* I think it needs to be less isolated, accessible from public transportation, where people could just walk in because its there, with one or 2 other small rooms for meetings or gatherings, so multiple things could be going on at once, i.e.,the sanctuary has dividing doors. And working bathrooms.
* Parking, accessible – maybe find a deserted car dealership on Central Avenue with a big glass window so people can ***see*** us. We need to be visible!
* White Plains doesn’t have that visibility. There is a bus, but it’s a bit of a hike up the stairs.
* With the real estate market the way it is now, it’s a long shot. In NYC there are a lot of empty storefronts. People may be hurting right now and potentially give a reasonable price just to have income. Finding something would take a lot of shoe leather and work.
* Zoning is an issue needing to be looked into – strict issues for a church zoning.
* Looked The Master’s School in Dobbs Ferry – Covid issues at the time, The Hackley School in Tarrytown – a gorgeous campus with potentially viable places. Did have issues. An actual chapel but a family lived there. A large all-purpose room but did not feel ‘churchy’ – but off the beaten path and not accessible.
* At South Presbyterian, we don’t have enough storage. We all have stuff in basements. According to Social distancing requirements, its not enough space – but now it should be – or as Covid lifts. They haven’t been as welcoming as we had hoped. We’ve been trying to have a sign hung since March, they gave us specs but then said it wouldn’t work after all. We redid the sign and sent it 2 months ago, still not up. But we have been invited to do things with them, but we have said No since they say ‘God’ and ‘Jesus’ and the windows are not aligned. I don’t think we’ve been the most gracious guests. I’m at odds with it.
* This is exactly what worries me about merging. Are we saying we can’t be in the same room with someone else’s ‘sacred texts’. We were a Christian denomination originally. If you claim to be a UU, that is not cool.
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| 4. When we complete the sale of 25 Old Jackson Avenue, FUSW’s assets will be approximately one million dollars. How should these assets be handled? Do you think we should spend as little as possible in the short term so as to preserve these assets, or would you favor investing some portion of these assets in congregational growth--in a more ideal location, for instance, in staff (including our minister) and in community outreach? |
| * I think we need to try to preserve. If we’re trying to keep some iteration of FUSW alive in a rented space – we need to put effort in finding and setting up that space, and THEN we can focus on congregational growth. We need a place where people can go. A conscious decision needs to be made into recreating FUSW 3.0 (Yonkers = 1.0, OJS = 2.0). How much are we willing to spend to try to create that? We have to make a decision on what we are going to look like.
* Its important to preserve assets we have until we know where we are going. Until we have a game plan, what are we investing in.
* Preserve.
* This ties into question 1. If we do decide to disband and dissolve – what happens to the assets? For those of us who have been pledging for years – do we divvy it up?
* The UUA would be glad to take it, I’m sure. It could be donated. If we wanted to make some large donations, there is probably a process.
* If we invest in the idea of keeping FUSW alive – honestly, we don’t have the energy for that. I couldn’t find 3 couples to lead Program Groups. We don’t have what it takes to get that all set up. We don’t have the energy and resources to think about setting up RE. We can’t attract young people – they will see 30 white heads swiveling around if they walk into the room. This will not attract young people.
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| 5. At present, we are a congregation that is predominantly white and predominantly of retirement or pre-retirement age. What would you like the demographics of our congregation to look like? Should we make sustained efforts to create this more diverse congregation? 6. What ideas do you have for attracting new members to our congregation? |
| * Everyone keeps saying RE and then young families will come. Knowing what it takes to create and continue an RE programs, it’s a challenge. Trying to build an RE program, based on what I know from my daughter, it is not the path for this congregation.
* Michael mentioned writing groups and someone mentioned painting groups – get those people in who are single or interested in getting involved – potlucks, game nights, community – things that people used to come together to do. To come together on *other* than Sunday – Wednesdays. Special interest groups – whatever you want to call it. People are hungry for community, for connecting, meeting people. If we as a congregation decide to move forward and maintain some integrity, be a place where people want to come together and DO things together – make some friends. THAT is how people will come together.
* RE is way way way too much work. You can’t teach an RE class with kids from 1st to 5th grade in the same class. That’s way too much. We are certainly not going to start one up.
* I’m not saying we become a singles club – but there are people who are single, or their partners don’t want to participate. Community, community, community. People want to be a part of something.
* We would be a community with a religious or spiritual façade – and not in the sense of fake. In the post Covid world, people want to connect. That’s why movies are coming back. People want to be with people. They are looking to connect. If we are going to survive and attract a diverse group, we need a diversity of activities. This is my idea of a game plan – much more feasible than trying to create an RE program.
* It sounds great – but do I want to start it, do I want to make it happen. No. I am burned out. When we say we need people to run things – crickets. I will send an email and get zero answers, or one or two ‘nos’.
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| 7. Are there other issues or ideas about FUSW’s future that you would like to raise? |
| * Back to Q1 – we may want FUSW to survive, but between the 2nd flood and Covid, I don’t know if it is possible. We are somewhat engaged, but somewhat tired.
* I don’t think emotionally the congregation ever fully moved on from the schism in the post-Peggy transition.
* I am on the board and have felt a sense of responsibility, but I have to be okay with leaving FUSW behind. I have to find ways to say good-bye to things. If we decide to disband, we have to find a way to keep in touch. I went to UU camp and it ended, but we have reunions every summer. We’re all in our 60s now, but we still stay in touch. Maybe we have parties or gatherings twice a year. It makes me sad to say that, but we may be beating a dead horse.
* When was the last time you looked at ads in the newspaper? If we are going to try to make it, we need a ***serious*** social media presence. If this congregation is going to survive, they have to figure out social media. Not to get in touch with young people – but with people who are not in the child-raising business at the moment.
* If there is a ‘we’ we are trying to portray, we may need to hire some child actors. I was trying to get an event together for kids with face-painting and balloons. It didn’t take off because it needed an April Castoldi.
* If this is the tone from five people who have been connected for a very very long time and are not able to see a way forward and not willing or have the energy to do the work, this is concerning.
* The initial response is ‘of course I want FUSW to survive’ – you have to respect the committee for making that the first question.
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