

**“How We Live”
Reflections
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden
Meriden, CT**

**New Member Sunday
April 9, 2017**

“We’re all in it together, for example...”

Tim O’Brien

My name is Tim O’Brien and I am chair of the Committee on Shared Ministry. This is a new committee that was formed this fall. My fellow committee members are Sandy Duffy, Pat Stark, and Cindy Ferguson. Jan comes to all our meetings. Technically she is not a member but plays a very important role as a consultant. She has helped us with researching and studying the different COSM models that are available. We have been working on the necessary steps toward becoming an effective committee.

Some of you may remember that we had a Committee on Ministry in the past, but a Committee on Shared Ministry is a different model. Actually the old Committee on Ministry was misnamed, because it acted as what is called a Ministerial Relations Committee. This type of committee is concerned with the spiritual health between the minister and the congregation.

The focus of a COSM is different. It’s concerned with the spiritual health of the entire ministry of the congregation as a reflection of mission fulfillment. The UUA website states, *“Ministry happens wherever individuals embrace the belief that their good works, their volunteerism, their acts, can help serve the mission and vision of their congregation.”*

The significant difference between the two models is that ministry is a shared effort, and we are collectively accountable for the outcome. The former COM model holds the minister solely responsibility for the ups and downs of a congregation. So if things are not going well, who do you blame? This current model that we are using reminds us that we can only look at ourselves and that we are all in this together.

So I said that the concern of a COSM is the spiritual health of the entire ministry that will be measured by “Mission Fulfillment”. Our committee has been following a COSM model recommended by the Rev. Robert T Latham, who is a UU minister and a writer.

Rev. Latham describes the connection between mission and ministry as follows:

- **Mission** is why a congregation exists.
- **Ministry** is everything it does to fulfill the **mission**.

Let me say that again.

- **Mission** is why a congregation exists.
- **Ministry** is everything it does to fulfill the **mission**.

What he is saying is that mission and ministry are inseparable. He goes on to say that whatever the stated mission, if you audit where the congregation's energy is focused, it will reveal the real mission of the congregation.

A few of the things the COSM is tasked with is assessing the minister and the congregation on how our mission is reflected in our ministries activities.

We will also be involved with educating everyone on the role of the COSM, keeping everyone aware of the mission, and making recommendations on whether or how the mission is being implemented.

So, what is our mission statement?
Practicing Loving Community
Advancing Justice
Nurturing Spiritual Growth

Since my involvement with the COSM, I started thinking about my activities in the church and the mission statement.

This mission statement rings true to me. I've been a member of this congregation for over 20 years; and through all those years, with the many people who have come and gone, this congregation has always been described as a loving community. The people sitting in this room today are different from the ones when I first started, with a few exceptions, and we still have a legacy as a loving community. (H20)

I've been involved with many of the ministries of the church and, as an introverted person, there are many times that I would rather not participate. It's hard for us introverts to muster up the energy sometimes. But, I am repeatedly amazed at how surprised I am that I get so energized each time I get involved, and I think it is because we have a loving community.

The same goes for social justice. This congregation has always had some kind of role in social justice. We have been very active lately. But even in times that we were not so active, there was always concern and justice was always a part of the conversation.

Many years ago we had a leadership retreat, and we spent the weekend discussing the issues the church was having at the time. The caveat was that any discussion had to be stated using an analogy we created for the day. It was a challenge, but the analogy language helped people from getting personal with their words.

The analogy was the image of the church as a large fruit-bearing tree. The roots represented our ancestors. I don't remember what the trunk and branches represented, but the various ministries of the church were represented by the fruit that the tree produced. This tree was unique because it produced more than one type of fruit. We decided that some people came to the church for the apples, some for the oranges, and so on and so forth.

I liked the analogy process. I liked the various fruits the church offered and that we all came for a variety of reasons.

One fruit that I wasn't quite interested in at the time was social justice. I was grateful that others people were interested and proud to be affiliated with a church that took action on social issues, but I was reluctant to get involved.

Well, in the past few years, I have been getting involved with the racism workshops and readings that have been offered by the Social Justice Council. I feel I've been educated and maybe even become a little bit "work" by the experience. I am trying to practice what I have learned, to share my experience and speak out. It has been a challenge but worthwhile.

All in all, through the many years, these experiences have been a part of my spiritual growth, a spiritual growth that has been enhanced by the Adult Religious Education activities such as the Buddhature book group I will go to this afternoon. I am so grateful to this church, and I have grown in more ways than just spiritual.

In closing, I invite each of you to look at your experiences with this congregation and examine how your ministry activities mesh with the mission of the church. Hopefully you will be as grateful as I am.

"Our Grounding, Our Vitality"

Sandy Duffy, offered by Jeff May

Extemporaneous message by Jeff May, given Sandy's absence due to illness.

"We Are Woven"

Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

Extemporaneous message on how we are connected—the interconnected web, the interdependence of human life and all life, the community intimate and extended of which we are a part.