

## Sanctuary Moderator's Report - February 2018 – May 2019

Joanna Begin, Moderator

### “A Vision for What Is Next”

#### From Experiment to Model

It has become increasingly clear over the last six months that our experiment has come to an end, and it is time to move into a new ministry model. We'll take the lessons we have learned, data we have collected, and the original vision to set up roots and build deep.

There are two scriptures that keep coming to my mind, and God has laid them on my heart with this challenge - how do we interpret, digest, and understand these scriptures in a way that is explicitly Sanctuary? We are a weird, progressive, welcoming, affirming, and outward facing church following the way Jesus lived and wanted others to live. The first passage of scripture is Ephesians 2:17-22, *“When he came, he announced the good news of peace to you who were far away from God and to those who were near.”*<sup>18</sup> *We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit.*<sup>19</sup> *So now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God's people, and you belong to God's household.*<sup>20</sup> *As God's household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*<sup>21</sup> *The whole building is joined together in him, and it grows up into a temple that is dedicated to the Lord.*<sup>22</sup> *Christ is building you into a place where God lives through the Spirit.”*

A person at work asked me if I could separate my upbringing in a church and who I am as a person. I think what he meant was would I be the person I am today if I had not grown up and practically lived in a church. The answer was no; my faith and truth are so much a part of me that I no longer think about where I am and where Jesus is standing. Instead, I know he is there as my cornerstone, and I trust and find my comfort and joy in that no matter what I do to my house or how many times it needs to be rebuilt, Jesus remains as the undamaged and strong foundation. This is where I believe Sanctuary is. We all know there is something special about the work we are doing, and we need to focus on our foundation by using everything we have learned up until this point. We have our cornerstone - bits and pieces of our foundation, but we need to cement that foundation to give us clarity and focus.

The second verse is so fundamentally church that I shook it off for a few months. Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, And behold, I am with you always, to the end of age.” Coming from an evangelical church this is ingrained into you as your only job. No matter how many times I have tried to move past this, God keeps laying it at my feet playing it in the background. I believe he wants us to make these words our own. When I first came to Sanctuary three years ago the question that was being asked was, “Who is our community?” After years of discernment and exploration, we now know who our community is, and we need to know how we can bring the love Jesus talks about in his teaching in a clear organized message.

I believe we carry out these two scriptures by:

1. Creating our playbook of how to be Sanctuary
2. Providing space, opportunity, and support for people to stand up and do what God is putting on their heart
3. Allowing room to still be experimental in our ministries and worship but not be an experiment
4. Finding ways to fill our cup so we can go out and fill others

## **Our Leadership Circle**

A win is our Leadership Circle's commitment to the life of Sanctuary. We started meeting twice a month beginning in February of 2018 in order to keep up with the high demands of our ministries and church. Our team has grown from five members to six with two changes throughout the year. We are starting to see our strengths and how we can use the gifts God has given us to lead the church forward.

- Branwen, Gini, and Lisa are our daytime boots on the ground! Heading into town and all around to meet with people, make phone calls, stay in touch with the larger UCC church, and take roles in our partnerships.
- Liz has used her background in Human Resources and the UCC to help us navigate the complexities of hiring new staff, looking into church policies, and focusing on more of the procedures needed to be in place to smoothly run an organization.
- Erin brings a scientist's mind and organizational leadership and is leaning-in to her role as treasurer, learning quickly just how much Amanda Coughlin has done for the church in the same position.
- I bring my math background, curriculum development, coordinator skills, and past church experience to drive practical decision making and help us ask what is next as the experiment comes to an end and we become clear about our call.

## **Challenges**

We recommend that we do not re-hire a Sanctuary Manager until we better understand our staffing needs. During our experiment we tried hiring for what we might need or hoped we would need. In this next phase we need to have concrete needs and wants before we grow our staff. For now, one lead pastor and two part time administrators are enough because they are good balance of the work needed to be done – the hands-on ministry in the community and our congregation, the social media and office administration tasks, and the financial and clerk work. There is need for outside contractors as there is much work to be done, especially freeing Wendy to be out in the community more. We would like Susan Corso to continue with us since her insight and focus to Sanctuary is beneficial and inspiring. After working with her closely this past year, we realize that her work goes beyond grant writing, and we want to expand her job to Ministry, Leadership, and Development Coach. She will be available to anyone in the church but will focus on the LC and Circles and Service Team, helping them with the foundation that needs to be finished. As lay members and leaders, we are all volunteers, and we need someone who is able to turn our ideas, wants, and needs into concrete procedure and policy. Given her experience with and knowledge of Sanctuary, Susan will help with these particular needs throughout the next year.

We also have a chance to hire a Field Education Student (seminary student who is exploring her/his unique call by working in the community) to help support the new and expanding faith formation ministries for adults, youth, and children. The rest of the work will be left to us as lay people with this new ministry model. We hope to build out our Circle and Service Team, and if needed, let some things go until we have the capacity to take on new initiatives.

Conflict has been real over the last year and a half and has consumed a lot of time and resources. Last winter, the LC began to seek resolution of a marked conflict with the Lakota Youth Stay program due to misalignment, growing interpersonal tensions, and unsuccessful attempts at one-on-one reconciliation. We have tried to find a way forward in four different ways. First, we reached out to LYS directly without success. Second, we attempted to engage the conflict through using Sheri Wilson's background in mediation. Third, we sought a Situational Support Consultation with the Committee On Ministerial Standing (COMS) through the Metropolitan Boston Association (MBA) of the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC (MACUCC) in order to bring us all together for resolution. Fourth, as recommended by the COMS, we brought in an outside expert, Sarah-Elizabeth, to guide us through a Restorative Circles process using reflective listening and a shared commitment to restoring relationships.

### **Successes and Hopes**

I believe the work we have been doing with Sarah-Elizabeth has and is hopeful. It has been a wonderful learning tool and has started us onto a path of healing. The LC was able to identify two specific concerns from the Concerned Members of Sanctuary group that participated in the COMS process. Firstly, that the staff-led model that was agreed upon as part of the crossroads process and build out over the past 5 years of the experiment needs to be reimaged. The LC and I agree 100% which is why we need to work together to make tough decisions; we need to right-size ourselves and commit to lay leadership development and engagement quickly. Secondly, some of the long-time members are feeling like there is not a space for them, and the long history and traditions of our church are not being honored or considered as we move into this new model of church. I believe this will be worked out as we focus on faith and leadership formation and build policy and practice in every aspect of our ministry.

We need better ways of educating new members about our rich history, growing our ministries, embracing our entire mission like the art gallery has, and finding partners that are walking parallel to us. One of the constant struggles the LC has right now is that everything looks awesome, yet we don't have the capacity to implement each new and exciting idea. The teacher/math dork inside of me sees a flow chart in our future, and I am excited to help create it. We have started the long journey of healing and learning how to better communicate with each other, but our work is not finished.

The parsonage looks great! The work that was so desperately needed outside and inside is done. Our investment provided a dual purpose – giving our Minister and her family a safe place to live and significantly increasing the value of the house.

Our Messy Church ministry in partnership with Hillside Community Church has hit the ground running. Children and parents have space to worship, socialize, break bread, and be in community together. This ministry has the potential to continue to grow.

## Looking Ahead

Growth and sustainability need to be looked at from all angles as we look to our future. Part of our practice needs to be defining success before we begin any new tasks. A lot of what the church does is hard to measure. It is our nature to set big, inspirational goals, but we need to know if what we are doing is working. By setting goals, developing bench marks, and being clear about what we are doing, how we will do it, and defining growth and sustainability for Sanctuary's way of being a church, we will finally be able to tell if we are growing as a community.

The last year and a half we've welcomed 15 new members, which is a big sign of growth. At the same time we still have some Sundays where only four people are present for worship. Maybe numbers don't matter, but maybe they do; the only way to know if we're reaching our goals is to define expectations. Creating common language and educating each other on what we are doing in the community through our numerous programs are essential, but we as an LC are not sure how to reach everyone in the congregation with updates. We are consistent with our newsletter publication, but that might not be the best resource for all people. Our Facebook community and social media impact has more than doubled this past year, which is potentially a different type of resource for some people. As we move to the future, we will continue to explore different ways of reaching different communities of people.

Sustainability is still our ultimate goal, which I believe we can reach in the next couple of years, similar to the way some presidential candidates are funding their campaigns – focusing on large amounts of small donations instead of the few big gives. Thousands of small contributions from our members, partners, and the people we are reaching in our community would help us continue towards sustainability.

I am excited about the next phase of Sanctuary, and I believe in our new lay-led ministry model. We learned at the Visioning meeting in March that members are eager to be engaged in a variety of ways. Creating space for our lay members to grow, develop, and lead is essential for the continued growth of Sanctuary's community and the greater community. My hope and prayer for this next year is that each of us live into our commitment as Sanctuary members, take risks together, and follow the Spirit's guidance into the future.

Submitted by Joanna Begin, Moderator

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