

## **Congregational Conversations – Written Questions and Responses April 30, 2017**

**Plymouth Church UCC Bylaw Revision Team:** Al Wallace (Moderator)

Susan Berry (HR Co-Chair), Mike Pierson (past Moderator), Richard Wilson (past Moderator)

**Panel:** Jerry Landeen (former University Congregational UCC Moderator)

Margaret Stine (current University Congregational UCC Assistant Moderator)

Rev. Liz Oettinger (former Plymouth Church UCC, Associate Minister / Consultant)

**Process:** Open Questions and Conversation was shared, and questions were also submitted in writing to allow for all persons who desired to participate. Since there was only the hour for this conversation, reflections were again requested from the various panel members and the Bylaw Revision Team members, inviting them to share their thoughts. As of the printing, these are the responses we have received thus far. Additional questions will be posted from the Neighborhood Groups Listening gatherings, as well as from the “Council Corner” opportunities and the Neighborhood Group gatherings.

We hope this allows an opportunity for every person to have information, participate in the process and share in discerning God’s leading for Plymouth Church as a congregation in our governance and in selection of ministerial leadership models and persons.

### **Written Questions & Comments**

1. (These first two questions were introduced to begin conversation as a repeat from the first Congregational Conversation, and no with the presence of more University Congregational UCC leadership. The responses from Rev. Mike Denton and David Anderson are from the previous conversation event.)

I can see many advantages to this format for Plymouth at this time. At the same time, I think we need to take seriously the issues/challenges identified, including the “triangulation” challenge. Could this potential challenge be ameliorated (made better) by appointing an ombudperson from the congregation who could serve as a neutral communicator between the congregation and pastors, and between the pastors themselves?

**Rev. Mike Denton** – Maybe. I’m not aware of another church setting in which this has been done. I could also see it being just one more opportunity to triangle that could get in the way of open communication.

**David Anderson** – Many churches do have a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee. At University Congregational UCC, it’s call the Leadership Staff-Parish Relations Committee. Their role is not as neutral communicator but rather to encourage direct conversation. They have articulated a covenant between leadership staff and congregation, and that covenant has been affirmed by the congregation as well as the leadership staff.

Here’s a copy of the covenant: <https://universityucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Leadership-Covenant.pdf>

Here’s a link to an FAQ about the UCUC LPRC: [https://universityucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FAQ\\_LPRC.pdf](https://universityucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FAQ_LPRC.pdf) Jerry Landeen is current convener of the LPRC. He will be speaking at the 12 noon forum on April 30.

2. How can we support the staff from possible over triangulation efforts from our congregation? How can the staff listen to all of us without being overwhelmed?

**Rev. Mike Denton** – As David mentioned, negative triangulation of staff is best dealt with by staff members' good communication with each other. Triangulation is one way of having conversations in a group and, although often spoken of negatively, it's natural for triangulation to be present as a means of discernment, negotiation and establishing power. Triangulation plus secrecy tends to be the place things start to fall apart.

**David Anderson** – This is a challenge, to hear from everyone who wants to share and yet also focus on other areas of ministry and management. Community forum and gatherings have been a helpful way for UCUC to hear perspectives in more manageable settings.

3. Has there been any input gathered from Montview Blvd. Presbyterian Church in Denver? They have utilized a co-pastorate model successfully since 1974. I'm confident they have much wisdom to offer at this point. - Wayne Duncan **No Response As of Printing**
4. Setting duties for Senior Minister, essential categories for Associate Ministers. **No Response As of Printing**

### **New Written Questions & Comments**

5. Who is leading this process? Council? Who is answering our questions?  
**Jane Dunkel** – The Council is leading this effort. Rev Steve Davis and Jennifer Castle are assisting with setting up meetings, tracking and posting questions and responses. Some of the answers come from others outside our community with expertise/experience with collaborative ministry and are attributed to them.
6. Kelle's role as the defacto Senior Minister has been an amazing gift. She led us through difficult times of healing, renewal, and rebirth. Has the Council thought about her current role as diminished, the first female person of color in top leadership position? Institutional racism?  
**Jane Dunkel** – As a new Council member, this question was of concern to me, so I followed up with others who have been on the Council longer than I. I was assured that Council leaders had checked with Kelle on this matter and that she is very supportive and desirous of entering into a collaborative ministry model with Steve as her Co-Minister.
7. What are their roles as co-leaders?  
What are their gifts and how are those reflected in those job descriptions and shared roles? Specifically, how are they going to work together? We want to hear from them both about their vision for themselves.  
See next question response.
8. At University Congregational UCC the preaching is shared equally among the collaborative ministers. How will preaching be shared between Steve and Kelle?  
**Jane Dunkel** – Here is what Steve told the Council:  
"Neither Kelle nor I see our co-leading as any kind of preaching or pastoring competition and our roles thus far have been based out of a great deal of communication with each other and great respect. I want to honor Kelle in her role as the lead pastor for worship. She has been gracious in offering me opportunity to preach and be part of the worship leadership in both services, along with many others to give voice to a diverse congregation and need in our faith community. As experienced preachers, we

minister in diverse roles, and I am clear on mine as one leading primarily in the organizational management of the church. While I will always welcome the opportunity for both our roles to continue to develop further, I want to be clear that the current roles are working well and we have an ever-increasing trust with each other and a growing vision of who we can be together as your co-leaders in ministry.”

I take him at this word, and couldn't have said it better. As a new member told me yesterday – “I joined when Steve and Kelle were already on board working together. Their joint leadership has been seamless to me; as far as I am concerned, you/we are already living into collaborative ministry . . . and it's working fabulously!”

**9.** Is this a Steve/Kelle model or something that has legs into the future? (Bob Woodruff)

**Jane Dunkel** – The by-laws were intentionally written so that the collaborative model is an option, as is a single Senior Minister. I believe that the intent is to review what's best for the church when [the inevitable] transitions occur. Who is available, what are their skills, are there two people who want to work together and can do so effectively, would this serve the needs of the congregation, or has one leader emerged who is the best fit? I see this as being decided on a case-by-case basis.

**10.** I am concerned about how the new collaborative ministry model will utilize our newly written covenant. Hopefully we will have opportunities to read it, voice it, share it. But how will Kelle and Steve help us tend to and be responsible for what we have covenanted to be and how will we, as congregants, be held responsible to it? (Jamie Shilling)

Jane Dunkel: This is a good question, and one better put to Kelle and Steve if they are called. However, for my two cents:

First, whatever model we choose and whoever we chose as our leaders, I think we all have a responsibility to **hold ourselves accountable**.

Second, to me the beauty of the collaborative model is that it takes away some of the hierarchy, which then places more responsibility **on us, where it rightly belongs**. We won't have one person to “blame” for things that dissatisfy us, we'll have two people who are working as a team to support one another and help us see the part that each of us plays in building a healthy community.

**11.** We're concerned that at Plymouth, unless both pastors are preaching regularly they won't be perceived as equal in ministry.

**Jane Dunkel** – I would hope this is not so. It's not how I feel right now – I view both Kelle and Steve as talented, committed, faithful people who are sharing their gifts with us in significant and meaningful ways. Of course, how we view them is up to us, isn't it? Isn't it something we can work on and control?

**Mike Pierson** – I definitely get the “divisiveness” concern, but it's natural that different congregants will have very different kinds of questions and wonderings about joint ministry, and that some people will care a lot about (and not know) how Kelle and Steve feel about this model and how they see it working in practice at Plymouth with the two of them. I very much understand Kelle and Steve wanting to be respectful of the Plymouth process as we move through it (and recognizing that much of the discussion has to do with the model in general and not how the two of them in particular will do it). But I thought it was helpful to hear from both Kelle and Steve at the post-Service meeting on Sunday, and I think it likely would be good to find other opportunities for them to speak to their vision and comfort w/ the proposed model. (Jane has helped accomplish that in her new comments.) Finally, while questions that go beyond the general model to particular ministers may be a little nervous-making, I see them (and paying attention to them) as also reflecting a caring about our ministers — and also as providing an opportunity to affirm both of them and the future for Plymouth that their ministry together can offer.

- 12.** Does Sec. 10.4 (Business Administrator) go away if we use the team / collaborative model? (Adele Reynolds)  
The original Sec. 10.4 does not go away. It is renumbered as Sec. 10.6 and content revised to reflect other updates in language.
- 13.** Individual support always needed (private and personal). (Adele Reynolds)  
**Jane Dunkel** – I do not know how these duties are currently divided up, but would hope that if any members or friends of the Plymouth community seek pastoral care, and would like to speak to either Kelle or Steve in particular, they would just have to call the office and ask for one of them. Alternatively, there may be days when one of them is available but the other not. Truly up to them.
- 14.** When a church transitions from senior minister to collaborative ministry what were the challenges during the transition and how were those handled. Anything we can learn from other churches' experiences.  
See responses of University Congregational UCC leaders elsewhere.
- 15.** Better Coffee?  
**Kyna Shilling** – Question #15 "Better coffee?" was delivered to me in a joking manor and while it is totally absolutely a serious question (*seriously, can we get better coffee??*), I'm also certain that we can eliminate it from this list as it is a question more suited to a different conversation than one about bylaws. Unless y'all would support a friendly amendment to the bylaws mandating better coffee :)  
**Rev. Mike Denton** – First, I fully support "better coffee" being included in the constitution and bylaws. My prayer would be that this lead action by Plymouth would spread like wildfire across the conference.
- 16.** (Shared after the initial submission from Lori Kaid by Curtis Martin)  
What problem are we trying to solve? (Curtis Martin)  
**Lori Kaid, Vice Moderator** – We are allowing Plymouth to have options by opening up the way our leadership is structured. Without this shift, for example, we are not able to call Kelle and Steve. In addition, we are eliminating calling out specific committees to allow us to have the flexibility to call together what is needed when it is needed.
- 17.** (Shared by Mike Pierson from Council Corner conversations.)  
How do we avoid a perception (or reality) of one of the co-ministers being the lesser of the two?  
**Jane Dunkel** – Again, I think how we perceive our co-ministers is up to us. I see exploring new leadership models as part of our journey to move forward into the new culture and world that surrounds us. Just as we must become aware of how institutional racism effects the lens through which we view the world, we may also want to explore how hierarchical models is only one lens through which to view leadership.
- 18.** (Shared by Mike Pierson from Council Corner conversations.)  
Isn't it important that each of the co-ministers have a real role in preaching and worship? Can you be a perceived equal at Plymouth without preaching on a regular basis, say at least once a month? Does Steve want to be more involved in worship?  
See response above.

**19.** (Shared by Mike Pierson from Council Corner conversations.)

Can Steve and Kelle provide the congregation with a sense of their vision of co-ministry at Plymouth and how they plan to make it work?

Both Kelle and Steve will be invited to address this at the Called Congregational meeting and following, before the vote to call them as our ministers.

**Additional Commentary:**

**Rev. Mike Denton** – I'm wondering if some of these questions aren't bylaws questions as much as they're presentation questions? What if, instead of just focusing on the wording of the bylaws, a Venn diagram was designed that - using Steve, Kelle and the congregation - showed areas held separately and shared responsibilities? Naturally, the areas with the most opportunities for collaboration would also be the areas for the greatest conflict but those realities all might be clearer and more easily discussed if presented in diagram format.

**Al Wallace (Moderator)** – Our ministry team has proven since last Summer they possess ample skill and ability to collaboratively meet our faith community's needs, and have great personalities that mesh well. Are there some questions and concerns? Certainly. There always will be – that is the nature of any church. But none of such weight as to stop our progress towards voting in order to move forward.

Let's move forward with positive will and spirit. Kelle and Steve will continue to parse their respective duties and preaching, with advice and consent from the Council, according to amended Bylaw Section 10. The by-law amendments are not just about Kelle and Steve, but seek to put our church family in a better place going forward regardless of present ministerial staffing.