

Building Good Relationships Between Active and Retired Ministers

Notes from the Breakout Collegial Conversations

Introductions and Presentations

On November 27, 2023, nearly 40 colleagues came together to reflect on what it takes to create and maintain positive, mutually respectful collegial relationships between active and retired ministers. Wayne Arnason, Richard Speck, Karen Mooney and Melissa Carvill Ziemer served as facilitators for the conversation which included a presentation, resource sharing and time for discussion.

The presentation segment featured six colleagues (three active ministers and three retired ministers) who were invited to speak about their experiences building a good relationship with one another. We are pleased to share the [recording of their presentation](#). The ministers who spoke were:

Kathy Sage who served Kingston Unitarian Fellowship in Kingston, Ontario for 14 years, and has been retired for almost 9 years.

Beckett Coppola who is the minister currently serving the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship in Kingston, Ontario. Beckett arrived in Kingston for the 2017-2018 year and is now serving her 7th congregational year with the community.

Kathryn Bert who is in her 21st year of parish ministry, serving the second congregation of her career in Vancouver, WA.

Millie Rochester who recently observed the 20th anniversary of her ministerial ordination.

Margalie Belizaire who is currently the settled minister of The Unitarian Church of Orlando, Florida, having served previously as assistant minister at The Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York.

Marni Harmony who is about to recognize the 50th anniversary of her ordination. She is honored to be Minister Emerita of the First Unitarian Church of Orlando where she served for 20 years.

Themes of the Conversation

After the presentation, we had a brief time for Q&A before moving into breakout groups for collegial conversation. A notetaker from each group submitted a summary of the broad themes of the conversation, which included the following:

- A discussion of covenants between retired and active ministers (with many opinions expressed and a diverse range of practices articulated). Issues raised included:
 - formal/written vs. implicit/conversational agreements

- public (share with congregation) vs. private/between colleagues covenants
- exploring boundary expectations and values and naming expectations
- respectful communication and awareness of when/how initial outreach happens
- when boundaries/expectations are unclear multiple complications and potential conflicts or unintended consequences may follow
- the benefits of mutual agreements for other colleagues
- chapters and the culture of UUism
- there was also a naming of how identity/gender and when/how clergy formation happened lifted up in contextualizing this particular presentation today
- The importance of cultivating relationships between retired and active ministers and forthright discussion of appropriate and necessary boundaries
- The quality of those early communications matter a lot - responsiveness, an attitude that affirms goodwill, warmth and a sense of trust go a long way.
- The readiness of the retired minister to actually let go of the ministerial role and responsibilities is a huge factor in the quality of the relationship. The retired minister must be prepared to really let go and to engage with their colleague with the assumption that difference is just difference. The colleague may do things very differently from the way the retired minister did things.
- Likewise, the readiness of the active minister to extend respect to the retired minister is a huge factor too.
- It tends to be less complicated with retired ministers who didn't serve in the congregation they are attending. When the retired minister served the congregation they wish to attend, the retired and active minister do well to talk forthrightly about power dynamics.
- To what degree is personality a factor in building a good relationship between active and retired ministers?
- The presence and participation of retired colleagues in UUMA chapters
- Do active ministers have time to build rich and nuanced relationships with retired ministers early in their time with a congregation?

Resources

UUMA Guidelines

[The UUMA Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry](#)

UUMA Task Force on Retired Ministers

[UUMA Task Force on Retired Ministers](#)

The Former Ministers Partner, the Former Minister, and the Current Minister

<https://uurmapa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Navigating.pdf>

Sample Covenant: Kathy & Beckett:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/5n1aye19jntq66h6dyd8k/2018-12-08-RCC-KS-Covenant-FINAL.pdf?rlkey=x11jswcb9fhiaqqs0athey7vt&dl=0>