

First Unitarian Universalist Church: A Challenging Congregation **Co-written by Susan Williams and the Rev. Sylvia Howe, 2023**

In 2022, after the Board unexpectedly negotiated Rev. Marian Stewart's retirement, a confused congregation struggled in an information void. The Rev. Sunshine Wolfe, the Congregational Field Staff for the Central East Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association was invited to meet with the congregation. They suggested that our congregation was an "After Pastor"¹ or Special Care Congregation.

Susan Williams and Rev. Sylvia Howe wanted to study these labels and presented the Board with a proposal to research the history of challenging ministries at the First Unitarian Universalist Church. This project, as presented to the Board, did not include Rev. Stewart's ministry or the interim ministry of Rev. Jennifer Brooks. The Board accepted our proposal, and we began our journey. In footnote #1, the number of identified "after pastor" behaviors are indicated. We believe that many more occurrences of misbehavior happened, but they cannot be verified, and therefore are omitted from this report.

We dug through the church's archival records and listened to past church leaders, ministers, and members (approximately 100 people, individually and in groups) talk about their experiences in the church. The individual stories were

¹ After Pastor Congregations: Long-lasting Consequences of Inappropriate Behavior by Rev. Lisa Presley October 7, 2020
The numbers indicate the approximate number of instances where this occurred.

Characteristics:

- Failure to thrive despite efforts to address chronic issues (1)
- Culture of distrust in the congregation, and particularly of leaders whether ordained or not (9)
- Unhappy relationships with subsequent leaders/ministers (5)
- Reluctance to confront inappropriate actions in the congregations (4)
- Culture of secrecy (8)
- Reactivity and anxiety in the congregational system (6)
- Anger (6)
- Shame (7)
- Loss and grief (4)
- Blaming the victim (3)

personal recollections, our research consisted of written Board minutes, Annual reports and the annual committee reports, Committee notes, consultant reports, newspaper articles and minister's reports and notes. We discovered that the church's history is deeply troubled. Not only ministers, but staff, lay leaders and members have violated ethical and behavioral principles for a healthy religious community. But we also heard stories of significant achievements and growth, when the leadership, the staff and the congregation worked together.

Since 1940, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus has experienced periods of deep conflict and remarkable cohesion. The conflict has torn us apart, the cohesion has enabled us to reach important goals. After all, we started as 18 religiously liberal folk meeting in rented space and have grown to a congregation of 550 members who find spiritual nourishment in a beautiful church in suburban Columbus. What has torn us apart, and what has enabled us to flourish? These are the questions which continue to challenge us.

This is our final report. In it we identify systemic issues which have led to our conflict-ridden behavior. This report does not identify individuals who contributed to our conflict. Instead, we have identified three systemic patterns: Identity, Boundaries and Accountability, which enable conflict to flourish.

IDENTITY

We begin with the history of our church, which helps explain our identity problem. Contrary to popular belief, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus was not the first Unitarian Church or Universalist Church in Columbus! Our Universalist heritage is a story left for another time. We begin with our Unitarian history. "Beginning in 1914 the Independent German Protestant Church

of Columbus, established in 1843, was a recognized liberal church in Columbus. (There was at least one active Universalist Congregation in Columbus, but we could find no documentation that they were involved in the formation of The First Unitarian Church). For twenty-six years the Independent Church was served by Unitarian minister, Rev. John F. Meyer. He and the church itself were affiliated with the Unitarian Association² Although the church thrived, the congregation was not without its challenges. They argued about money (how to pay a minister, when the founders from Germany were accustomed to the state paying the minister) and the fear of being too liberal in an increasingly conservative time. In 1939, when Rev. Meyer retired, the Independent Church called a traditional Christian minister to replace him. A small group of liberal members withdrew and asked Rev. Meyer to lead them. They contacted the American Unitarian Association with a request to organize a Unitarian Church. On June 27, 1940, a group of 18 charter members met at the Southern Hotel and organized the First Unitarian Church of Columbus. In addition to Rev. Meyer, The Rev. Herman Newman and the Rev. Lon Ray Call became the organizing ministers. In 1941 the congregation called The Rev. Clyde Williams as its first minister. In 1943 he resigned to become an Army Chaplain in Europe.

The First Unitarian Church began as the melding of the original liberal Christian group and people in search of a religiously liberal home. The Constitution adopted on June 27th, 1940, began with a statement of purpose “In the love of truth and the Spirit of Jesus we unite for the worship of God and the service of man.”³ Our beginning is in liberal Christianity, as was the norm for Unitarian churches of the time. With time and the influence of the religious

² From a selection of material by George Schoyer from a history of our church by Margaret Bausch

³ From the June 27, 1940 Constitution of the First Unitarian Church of Columbus

humanist movement out of the University of Chicago and our association with The Ohio State University, we grew as a religious community with no clear theological identity.

The First Unitarian Church's initial issue was theological. The tension was between its origin as an implicit Unitarian liberal Christian congregation and an increasingly humanist congregation. Were we Liberal Christian? Humanist? None of the above? Because we never resolved this issue, other controversial issues caused dissension among us. Founded before the post WWII fellowship movement, we were always a minister centered congregation. But, the influence of the university and the humanist movement encouraged us to question, if not actually mistrust, those in authority (both lay and ordained.) We have a pattern of both adoring and distrusting both ministers and leaders. We've also had untrustworthy ministers, lay leaders and staff to confirm our mistrust.

In addition, our involvement with social justice issues became divisive. Until 1959, when the congregation moved to our present location at 93 West Weisheimer Road in suburban Columbus, ministers and the congregation were united in Social Education and Social Service efforts. These ranged from local food and clothing drives, aid for refugees in Europe and forums on critical social topics. The congregation wrote to President Roosevelt urging that Jewish families be allowed to settle in the United States.⁴ When we moved to our present location conflict arose. There was an influx of less justice-oriented members seeking a more conventional religious appearance without the traditional religious trappings they rejected. At the same time the number of people interested in more than "good works" grew. We moved closer to patterns of Public Witness, Community

⁴ 2012 History of the First Unitarian Universalist Church by Linda Thompson

Organization and Advocacy for Social Change. Conflict arose over the nature of the church's role in social action: individual vs collective, minister as spokesperson and role model vs minister as private advocate.

We grew from small to medium to large due to outside growth patterns affecting us rather than our own efforts and learning processes. We have never resolved our identity conflicts over our size, whether we want to continue growing or whether social justice is central to who we are as a religious community.

Our size conflict is most troublesome in how it affects our relationship with staffing. Our staffing issues are endless. First Unitarian Universalist will raise money to build buildings but struggle for years to add a new staff position, especially if a professional salary is appropriate. We switch salaries around to create new positions instead of adding staff, a practice which builds resentments between factions within the church. Identifying fair wages, benefits, etc. as a justice issue during a Stewardship campaign means there are now two identity issues, justice, and staff expansion, working against it. We have serious challenges as an employer and historically have made some unfortunate hires. Some employees have been inadequate or poorly matched to the job. We lack clarity when it comes to roles and expectations. There have been serious personality clashes between called ministers. We complain about employees and yet keep them for decades, at least once because we had underpaid someone for so long that we feared they couldn't afford to retire. First Church doesn't fire people; we negotiate a resignation no matter how egregious the cause for their departure.

We claim to have a diverse theological identity and struggle with tolerance for

different practices that appeal to newer members or people we might attract. Some people are emotionally triggered by different practices that appeal to other groups within what they consider their religiously safe space. Moving people out of their comfortable Sunday morning expectations gets nasty responses. We have had identity-based conflicts over humanism versus spirituality, Paganism, liberal Christianity, or anything that appears irrational to some.

New identity groups are integrated slowly. We take our time transitioning from them-to-us thinking. Queer people, trans people, people of color, those with physical challenges and perhaps most recently, the neurodivergent, are accepted in stages that start with “doing it our way”, slow changes that “don’t rock the boat,” a tentative, gradual step into leadership and then, sometimes reluctant, acceptance.

The on-going (now pretty much underground) debate about the place of children, youth and young adults in our congregation has never been resolved. Are we a family church welcoming young people into our worshiping community? Are we a haven for adults who are seeking a like-minded group of religious seekers and thinkers? Are we a diverse, multi-generational congregation willing to be transformed and enriched by our differences?

Our lack of a deep understanding of our identity: who we are and what is our purpose as a religious community leads to recurrent unresolved conflicts and divisions that tear us apart. It seems to us that developing a clear identity is a primary task for all of us: Board, Staff and Congregation. This cannot be done by one group alone. It should be a communal act to identify, understand and celebrate our community as a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

This might begin by clearly identifying our core values and beliefs. When the church began, this seemed to be an easier task, for the Church's purpose was mainly theological: Unitarians believed in one God, not a divided one, and in the validity of the Christian Ten Commandments. This became a greater challenge when God was removed as a central focus of community and religious diversity became our norm. Could we balance our core values: individual vs community; faith vs reason; social justice as an individual choice or a communal response? In 1984, with the approval the 7 Principles⁵ we gained a bit more clarity...but we are challenged anew with the introduction of the 8th Principle.⁶

What are our explicit and implicit core values? Which might we use to develop a clear identity? Are the 7th and possibly an 8th Principles a viable source to create a strong identity?

BOUNDARIES

If you don't know who you are or if there is identity confusion, then it's hard to define and enforce boundaries. Boundaries are how we know who we are and what is important to us. They reflect our core values and beliefs. They provide the principles of appropriate behavior between and among members of our congregation. Boundaries are necessary for the congregation, ministers, and the

⁵ We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

⁶ We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism in ourselves and in our institutions.

staff to be able to develop healthy relationships. Without strong boundaries we don't feel safe, a culture of secrecy and mistrust becomes a serious problem, and ethical transgressions are far-reaching and often overlooked.

Since the early days of our congregation, ethical boundaries have been lax or non-existent. We found documented evidence that without clear behavioral boundaries, ministers, lay people and staff indulged in unethical, often abusive behaviors that have had destructive results. In the late 60s and early to mid-70s some of us whole-heartedly entered the sexual and drug experimentation of the era. This behavior was part of a national confrontation of existing societal mores and traditions. Experimentation among the teens was often overlooked and seldom given any appropriate guidelines. For some young people and their guardians, our church was a safe place to explore. For other Unitarians old and young, the perceived hedonism of our church community was a huge barrier to their participation. In the early to mid-70s ministers, staff, and lay leaders were openly and/or secretly involved in the "Open Marriage" ⁷ experiment. In addition, the use and abuse of alcohol was widespread. Board meetings, committee meetings and in all social gatherings, wine and spirits were routinely present. There were no clearly defined boundaries for appropriate behavior for ministers, staff, lay leaders and congregants that could shape healthy behavior as a religious community.

Because of our misinterpretation of the 1st Principle⁸ to mean that any belief or behavior is acceptable, we have a history of tolerating members "right" to express their opinions, even when that expression is divisive and wounding to

⁷ A staff member facilitated a discussion of the 1972 book, *Open Marriage: A New Lifestyle for Couples* by Nena O'Neill and George O'Neill. Several couples experimented with the concept.

⁸ The inherent worth and dignity of every person

others. We have tolerated verbal abuse in annual meetings, language policing of sermons, ridicule of individual beliefs (particularly UU Christians) and sexual/emotional abuse by ministers and leaders who used their power to intimidate those who were less powerful.

For many years the leadership and congregation were involved in a conflict involving the disruptive behavior of one member. This person was a charismatic volunteer who organized many important programs, and at the same time led people to believe they were part of the ministerial staff, verbally abused members and friends, and harassed members with emails and written letters. It took years before this behavior was confronted and a resolution emerged. Why did it take so long? Could it be because this member was black, we feared being labeled “racist” and therefore tolerated the destructive behavior? Eventually a policy was accepted by the Board which defined the limits of destructive behavior. This Disruptive Behavior Policy was useful in this situation, but it is unclear how many congregants, lay leaders and Board Members are aware of it even now. Therefore, it has not been used consistently, and when used, we suspect some documentation has been lost or discarded. In a 1997⁹ report by congregational consultant Sherry King, she recommended “that the congregation engage in a negotiation process to reach agreement about what are fair ways to deal with minority disagreements with decisions. It is imperative that clear guidelines be established regarding: (a) clear lines of decision making, (b) how to fall in behind a decision once made, (c) clear norms for acceptable behavior.” This recommendation depends on establishing a clear identity and healthy boundaries for behavior.

⁹ Summary of the Congregational Assessment and Addendum, May 1997, Sherry King, Congregational Consultant.

Governance documents, specifically Board approved policies, set limits and define boundaries. They define that within these limits you have the authority and freedom of choice to do for us that which we cannot do alone or cannot do as a large group. Boundaries must be lived to be real. Reviewing and updating policies without actively and consistently measuring the congregation's lived reality against the policy's intent is busy work. This means that a method of accountability is necessary for these policies to be useful tools for creating a healthy congregation. Are our governance documents and policies helping to create the Beloved Community we long for, or are they ignored and ineffective?

Enforcing boundaries is sometimes unpleasant, especially if it reveals our identity contradictions or shames someone. Unitarian Universalists have a theological issue with shame and shaming, so we sacrifice the welfare of the entire community to the dysfunction of individuals. We have had our disruptive behavior policy since 2004. The policy works when used! But there is still avoidance and confusion around this policy, and the record keeping of who has been informed they are no longer welcome and under what conditions they may return is sketchy at best.

We have documented sexual experimentation and abuse, verbal and physical intimidation and abuse, considerable drinking, vigorous to nasty debate, and spotty supervision of our youth who indulged in drugs and sex, and lax administration of staff. We can't blame these destructive behaviors on any one person. We can only blame ourselves because we are all part of a system which perpetuates this unhealthy behavior. If we expect to develop into a healthy Unitarian Universalist congregation, then WE NEED CLEAR BOUNDARIES for ministers, staff, leaders, and members.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a way of determining if our boundaries work. It provides the tools to understand the relationship between people granted authority to the people receiving it. “Accountability is about delivering on a commitment. It is about being responsible to an outcome, not just a set of tasks. It’s taking initiative with thoughtful, strategic follow-through.”¹⁰ We grant others authority to get things done in our congregation: clergy, congregation leaders, staff, and members alike.

But, for boundaries and accountability in a congregation to work as we desire, we need to understand a not always understood or accepted difference in power among the participants in church life. Whether we like it or not, by virtue of their ordination and calling by a congregation, ministers are among the most powerful participants in Unitarian Universalist congregational life. They arrive with the reputational power of their role which is based on their education and experience. As Unitarian Universalists we need to understand this distinction. Even though ministers are often called to our ministry from our midst, Ministers are “not one of us”. This means that clear boundaries and a system of accountability are vital to a successful ministry. As an Association, it has taken many years for ministers and laypeople to appreciate the importance of this distinction. It is a cultural shift still in process.

Although necessary for clergy, boundaries and accountability also need to be applied to staff and lay leaders. Clear boundaries and role expectations are vital to the success of a healthy congregation. Peter Bregman, in a Psychology Today article, “The Right Way to Hold People Accountable,” lists five points that are

¹⁰ The Right Way to Hold People Accountable by Peter Bregman, Psychology Today, Jan. 20, 2016.

necessary for positive accountability. These five points are as follows: 1. Clear: Expectations (what do we want), 2. Capability (does the person have the necessary skills), 3. Measurements (how will success be measured), 4. Feedback (regular reviews) and 5. Consequences (what will happen if boundaries, goals, expectations are not met. Although Bregman's model is mainly for the business community, we believe it is also applicable for religious communities: Ministers, Leaders, and Staff.

In our research we discovered that role confusion, lack of appropriate boundaries, poor or lacking job descriptions are commonplace in our congregation. Whether it is due to a lack of necessary leadership training or our own anxiety about wielding authority, too often we fail to retire authority when the job is done, rescind authority if the job isn't getting done or revoke authority if it is being misused or abused, People, especially people who have had bad experiences with dominance, confuse dominance and authority. They don't want to be dominated and lose their autonomy. They don't want to be bullies dominating anyone else. Hence, they reject authority and fail to hold others or themselves accountable.

Added to this are two key indications of a troubled congregation from the list of characteristics: first, loss and grief; second, shame. Shame can be described "as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."¹¹ Significantly, grief and shame are both intense feelings of loss. Shame especially attunes us to the loss of our identities, the love, belonging, connection, and security we seek in a religious

¹¹ Accountability: Shame vs Guilt" by Carol A. Lambert, MSW, Psychology Today, January 21, 2021

community. Unattended both grief and shame can isolate us. Our Unitarian Universalist faith can bring us together to share our grief and give comfort. Indeed, one of the most significant areas of growth that has held First Church together has been the strength and scope of our Caring Team. Unfortunately, our theology and our spiritual practices are less prepared to confront the shared shame of recognizing our community's brokenness or the harm we've done whether it's a pattern of poor boundaries and betrayals of trust or confronting the Unitarian Universalist Association wide challenges of our racism and white privilege. Connected by loss, shame and grief can trigger each other. Shame and grief are among the reasons that accountability is difficult to enact. Openness, trust, and the safety to be vulnerable are all needed between the evaluator and the person held to being accountable. Otherwise, individuals tend to protect themselves against feedback. Then, the consequences are likely to be ignored. We need to develop the skills to be able to speak our truths in love.

A necessary part of accountability is to develop a covenant, not a legal contract or a policy, but a sacred promise wherein we commit ourselves to uphold values in all our relationships that ensure our mutual well-being and honor the 7 Principles. First Unitarian Universalist Church does have such a covenant of respectful relations, but are we living it? It's pointless to be in a covenantal relationship if the parties are not accountable to each other. Covenanting and re-covenanting, when a relationship is not working, are the bedrock of Unitarian Universalism. Mourning together helps us through our grief; reaffirming and repairing our covenants is how Unitarian Universalists confront and heal our shame.

CONCLUSION

We end this report with hope. Our dirty laundry is beginning to be aired. The secrets, shame, and loss and grief which have accompanied our challenging “after pastor” history is being brought into the open. This requires honesty, courage, and much compassion to do this. We are beginning to rectify systemic structures that have encouraged unhealthy behaviors. We acknowledge that our report is written from the perspective of the culture in which we live. A clear example is our current view of the hedonistic culture of the 60’s and 70’s. For many of us living at the time, it was exciting, freeing, and inspiring. Only now can we understand the shadow side of such behavior. Such it is with the complexity of all human behavior. No behavior exists in isolation. All behavior is relational. Everyone is ultimately responsible for their behavior.

Our task force set out to whether First Church was indeed a “Challenged,” congregation as suggested in the four goals ¹² the UUA set for us when we were designated the first “Special Care Congregation.” Our preliminary report based on archival research indicated that we are a match for all ten of the After Pastor characteristics. This final report, based on research and interviews, expands our understanding of how and why we are “challenged.” We identified behaviors harmful to being a trustworthy community that range from misguided to traumatic due to the behavior of leaders, including ministers, staff, and elected leaders over our 83-year history.

We also found hope. The theory at the heart of the After Pastor essay is: “There are very predictable outcomes from congregations where there have been

¹² Staff/Board relations; Conflict resolution and transformation in all areas of church life; Creation of a covenant between members of the Congregation who are ministers - both UU and from other denominations - and the Congregation; and intentional work as a recovering Congregation.

boundary violations. These outcomes persist until intentionally challenged and changed—they continue well beyond the tenure of the misbehaving person, and even when the behavior may not be in the conscious history of the congregation.”¹³

True, we found boundary violations as far back as the 1950s and up to the predetermined limit of our inquiry, the end of Rev. Belletini’s ministry. What we didn’t find were convenient villains to blame for our systemic conflicts. Too often our own lack of boundaries and accountability, fostered by our own identity confusion, invited imperfect and wounded people to hurt us. We are all responsible for a culture that struggles with its identity, lacks appropriate boundaries, and fails to hold itself and others accountable.

Despite these on-going challenges our church is still here in an age of church decline in the larger culture. We have a history with experiences and resources upon which to build. We have lots of mistakes from which we can learn. We have changed before and can change again. The world doesn’t need our reason and love unless we first transform and heal ourselves.¹⁴

Systemic culture changes when the individuals within it change. First Unitarian Universalist Church has a history of growing in healthy ways that have balanced our unhealthy ways. If our healing depends on our ability to change ourselves, it is reassuring to look back and see that we have been changing all along. Look at our 1942 charter¹⁵ here our primary purposes were public worship,

¹³ After Pastor Congregations: Long-lasting Consequences of Inappropriate Behavior by Rev. Lisa Presley October 7, 2020

¹⁴ We extinguish this flame, but not the light of vision. As we go forth, let us heal and transform ourselves and our world through reason and love.

¹⁵ The purpose or purposes for which said corporation is formed are: To justify the ways of God and man and in connection with, owning, maintaining, developing and conducting a church for public worship, schools and other institutions in which to carry on scientific research in truth, secular and religious, and conducting public worship, lectures, and religious and secular education and for these purposes receiving, accepting and acquiring funds, stocks, securities and properties by donations, bequests, devices or otherwise and holding, invest in, reinvesting, converging, exchanging, selling, transferring, leasing, releasing, mortgaging, pledging and disposing of, any and all funds, stocks (sic), securities and property so received and acquired for the purpose of maintaining

education, lectures and accepting financial gifts as a non-profit corporation. Our worship standards were and remain high, and our music program is robust. Our adaptation to online services during the pandemic was truly impressive. First Church has long been known as the home of the School for Young Children, and recently Red Oak School. Despite latent tension around hearing and seeing children and youth in our midst, we've re-committed ourselves to our Religious Exploration program. Whole families are now visible in our sanctuary. We've managed multiple capital campaigns to build and then expand our facility. We are good at raising money to build our physical facilities, but we continue to be challenged by the hidden issues around building staff and granting authority to our leaders. Once we learn how to clarify the expectations of our staff as well as train and prepare our elected leaders to lead, other changes will come more easily. Change and growth is as much a part of our history as our problems.

Our caring community, not even mentioned in the charter, stands, along with the quality of worship, as the anchors that have held us through many of our storms. Both worship and caring teams have trained volunteers to be worship coordinators and pastoral care givers.

We cultivated better listening skills in Covenant Groups, and we continue to work on "speaking our truth with love." Our Membership Team's role has expanded significantly and continues to evolve. We have learned how to raise funds while building and celebrating community all at the same time. We could go on; we hope we have made our point.

We are aware that some congregants want a reckoning with names and dates.

said church, schools, institutions not for profit, and the doing (sic) of all acts, exercising all powers and assuming all obligations necessary or incident thereto. April 10, 1942

While we will provide a timeline of our research, including names and harm done, it will be incomplete and impossible to prove. We recommend holding the timeline as confidential. We have identified some offenders and suspect that others remain lost in secrecy. Blaming does help us vent our pent-up feelings. However, blaming does so at the cost of diverting us from facing our own complicity. Grieving our losses as a community is healing and can also honor our anger and frustration. The timeline should not become the congregation's new narrative. Creating an honest communal narrative that accepts both our positive and negative sides is the work of the entire congregation.

This is our final report. We hope that it helps future leaders and ministers better understand our beloved First Unitarian Universalist Church, so that when the inevitable challenges arise, they will be resolved in healthy, life-affirming ways.

Susan Garland William: long-time member and volunteer and former First Unitarian Universalist religious educator.

Rev. Sylvia L. Howe: minister-member and volunteer, retired Unitarian Universalist minister ordained by this congregation in 1980.

Examples of “After Pastor” Characteristics 1940 - 2016

As you will see, our list of examples has expanded considerably from the initial report submitted in 2022. As our investigation deepened, we found more and more examples of “After Pastor” behavior. Undoubtedly there are many more.

A. Failure to thrive despite efforts to address chronic issues (2)

1. Reluctance to staff for growth
2. Ignoring numerous studies indicating growth needs to be a priority
3. Never consciously deciding what size church we want to be
4. Members ignoring or avoiding talking with visitors or new members
5. The expectation that it is the responsibility of new folks to find their own way in just as the current members once did
6. Failure to sustain the kind of programming that helps newcomers find a community or communities within the church that match their interests and gifts,
7. Failure to sustain mentoring relationships
8. Avoiding conflict on the one hand, while having disruptive conflicts just often enough to keep our membership at the bottom of a large church for four decades.
9. Occasional efforts at leadership development without committing to multi-year programming that gives potential leaders time to evolve and build good working relationships with each other, staff and ministers

B. Culture of distrust in the congregation, and particularly of leaders whether ordained or not (9)

1. Challenging Board decisions
2. Constant arguing over budget allocations (it’s getting better)
3. Role confusion between ministers and staff and congregants
4. Unrecognized, undocumented job shift, where staff hired to fill a job description are expected to fulfill different roles that changed without negotiation, at times to fulfill a supervisor’s needs over that of congregation’s chosen mission
5. No clear understanding among members of how decisions are made in a large church resulting in the breakdown of communication, multiple uncoordinated solutions for the same problems and silos competing for resources and volunteers
6. Unacknowledged leaders with reputational power unduly influence decisions without proper input from others
7. The called minister is not accepted as a leader with a special role in the congregation
8. The need to feel the minister is “one of us,” which has led to ministers becoming “one of” subgroups within the congregation.
9. Deciding on capital campaigns and building projects and then calling a minister or senior minister and expecting them to embrace the project.
10. First Unitarian Universalist Church doesn’t have ministerial “honeymoon” periods, instead we greet ministers with a “gauntlet of conflicts” to see how they handle conflict.
11. We maintain a mix of staff hired from outside the congregation with staff hired from within to “keep an eye” on the outsiders

12. Hires from inside lack clear guidelines/boundaries or training for how to handle their relationships with friends while employed

Unhappy relations with subsequent leaders/ministers (5)

1. At least four ministries ended in a negotiated settlement
2. Antagonistic relation between the Ministers and Boards
3. Ministers blamed for whatever happens in the life of the congregation and expected to solve whatever problems they inherited when called
4. New ministers are seldom given a “honeymoon period” but are tested by conflicts their first year
5. Board members are not given the training they need to be effective leaders
6. Neither board members elected nor lay leaders recruited for their fresh perspective, outside expertise and skill sets have little to no knowledge of our history and latent conflicts
7. Our participation in the UUA’s ministerial search process which encourages ministers and congregations to reveal their best selves while minimizing their faults, resulting in a long series of unrealistic expectations and inevitable disappointments

D. Reluctance to confront inappropriate actions in the congregation (4)

1. Poor supervision of youth during the 1960s and 1970s
2. Failure to confront and hold accountable ministers/leaders/congregants who verbally abuse or bully others
3. Failing to write and use a disruptive behavior policy until 2004 in response to two decades of disruptive behavior by one individual including:
 - a. failure to follow financial accountability standards, jeopardizing the congregation's non-profit status
 - b. abiding with policy on a display in Fellowship Hall that impinged on other group’s spaces
 - c. a pattern of undermining the motives and integrity of the board and other lay leaders with inflammatory, exaggerated statements and falsehoods
 - d. pressuring and intimidating staff and volunteers (including intimidating two female Board Chairs)
 - e. fostering a sense of crisis in the church, specifically stirring up conflict during the departure of one senior minister and creating a conflict that took the *majority* of the next senior minister’s first year
 - f. causing multiple members, including lay leaders to leave the congregation
 - g. assuming a ministerial stance that mislead community leaders to assume this person was one of our ministers, causing confusion and embarrassment for our actual ministers
4. Continued confusion and lack of education during ministerial transition and the education of new Board Members regarding our Disruptive Behavior Policy
5. Trivializing necessary record keeping by referring to the Disruptive Behavior Policy’s confidential file as the “naughty box”

6. Negotiating a resignation instead of firing a minister or staff person who behaves in an unprofessional manner or is simply unqualified
7. Tolerating the behavior of long time members who repeatedly lose their temper, send nasty emails, verbally abuse staff or demand the resignation of staff with whom they are personally upset

E. Culture of secrecy (8)

1. At least four instances ministerial sexual misconduct
2. Several instances of staff and lay leadership sexual misconduct
3. One, possibly two, instance of a minister's sexual relations with a minor
4. Alcoholism by ministers and lay leaders
5. Ministers' inappropriate personal relationships with members are overlooked or tolerated
6. Withholding of serious medical issues by a minister
7. Failure of Board to communicate openly with staff and congregation
8. Poor relationships between the senior minister and other ministers
9. Instead of learning our history (positive and negative) new members learn by gossip and innuendo

Reactivity and anxiety in the congregational system (6)

1. Dissatisfied members leaving the church without acknowledging the reasons for their discontent
2. Inappropriate reactions to stressful situations in the congregation
3. No clarity on what it means to be a "justice church"
4. Intimidating phone calls, emails, and personal confrontation when a decision is made that one doesn't agree with
5. Shouting matches at congregational meeting...trying to convince others of the worth of one's personal opinion
6. Seeking a new minister that is unlike the previous minister, forgetting the positive qualities of the old minister or wanting to clone a previous minister
7. Inability to objectively see the positive and negative aspects of a minister's/leader's relationship with the Board/congregation

Anger (6)

1. Inappropriate reactions to Board decisions
2. Failure to confront inappropriate anger from ministers/staff and leaders
3. Failure to confront and honor boundaries related to inappropriate anger directed at ministers/staff and leaders
4. Years when annual meetings ran-on as issues were debated
5. Years when hurtful debating was tolerated and celebrated
6. Anger frequently used to shame others
7. Anger is one of four alternatives to dealing with being shamed in a healthy, healing manner,

H. Shame (7)

1. Casting aspersion on those who are theists, pagans, spiritual, or anyone whose belief system is not totally rational
2. Belittling those who do not actively participate in social justice issues

3. Shaming staff into resigning
4. Middle aged or younger newer members are unaware of the level of anger and shaming tolerated before the disruptive behavior policy was introduced in 2004
5. Minimizing the importance of keeping good records regarding who has been banned under the disruptive behavior policy and the conditions under which they are allowed back
6. Our own embarrassment, avoidance and discomfort with having a history of disruptive behavior which minimizes our efforts to enforce boundaries
7. Resistance to admitting we shame each other in multiple ways, see #6 under anger above
8. Lack of recognition that our introversion and cliquishness can be experienced as shunning by visitors
9. Shaming and blaming are closely related so many of the bullets under blaming the victim could be repeated here.

Loss and grief (4)

1. The absence of any kind of caring community in our original charter other than the non-profit status allowing us to accept donations
2. Denial of loss and grief during the early years when the average ministerial stay was three years
3. The sudden and unexpected death of a young minister tarnished by gossip
4. The glossing over of the hurt experienced during the turbulent and experimental 60s as we celebrated aggressive debating, and many marriages did not survive the era of sexual experimentation
5. The suicide of a member which wasn't memorialized for two decades when his children requested their father be memorialized with their mother
6. The decline of Group Date from a safe place for singles to mingle to an environment that attracted predators taking advantage of the vulnerable, with an RV in the parking lot for swinging
7. Denial in the form of moving on, not dwelling on the negative, nobody wants to join a sinking ship, forgetting or not mentioning the dark side of our history etc.
8. The minister we were happy with the longest excelled in dealing with loss and grief and memorial services, the second longest overlapped and excelled in pastoral care, especially grief
9. Few congregational rituals to acknowledge deep feelings of loss and grief both personal and collective
10. Lack of recognition of the connection through loss of grief and shame, leaving us ill equipped to grieve and mourn our shame, especially the collective shame related to so many social justice issues

I. Blaming the victim (3)

1. Under supervised teens blamed for their inappropriate behavior
2. Rumors tying the unexpected death of an unmarried minister to the possibility that he was gay
3. Firing a staff member who confronted a minister about his inappropriate behavior with a youth, to find out decades later, the minister was abusing the youth

4. Dismissing warnings or complaints by staff regarding other staff as personal grudges without further inquiry
5. Dismissing the concerns of volunteer lay leaders regarding the competency of a staff person until the problems became painful obvious and were dealt with by negotiated resignations, never firing
6. Blaming parents and RE staff for not keeping children quiet during worship
7. Blaming the hearing impaired for being curmudgeons about noise in a worship center First Church purposely designed to carry sound for the choir and our many musical events
8. Blaming each other for having a diversity of priorities while claiming we welcomed diversity and failing to create a process for discerning priorities
9. Blaming new or younger members for not pledging enough when from the beginning our church culture has under pledged
10. Blaming new or younger members for not volunteering when the congregation had created an atmosphere of choosing between competing teams or silos
11. Blaming new or younger members for not doing it the right way, or our way when First has had a culture of reinventing the wheel for most of our history
12. Blaming congregants whose needs, interests, skills, reasons for joining and staying did not attracted them to justice work
13. Blaming the deeply committed justice activists among us for being angry and resentful when their critique of First Church's representational form of justice work was valid and had a history going back to the move from the OSU campus to residential Clintonville.