

Sabbatical Sessions

The UCC offers this guidance, “Sabbaticals are times of refreshment, nourishment, and refocusing ministry for both a minister and a congregation.” While Pastor Brent is away, both he and the church are invited to consider three questions that we hope help re-focus our shared responsibility for the church. Engaging these questions openly provides the chance to reflect both of how we are called to be church and how lay leadership and Pastor share in the responsibility for working toward that understanding. We are delighted to be bringing in the Rev. Dr. John Nelson who is the Pastor at the Salisbury UCC church in Connecticut to help facilitate these questions. He is familiar with our church and should be an excellent facilitator.

For each of the three sessions we ask you to do some preparation. Following is a framing for the question we will be exploring this coming Sunday. We invite you to read it in advance and spend some time thinking/praying about the question before coming to the session.

Finally, we hope to explore in each session how we can live into our understanding in ways that are sustainable and to consider what is Pastor Brent’s role and what is the role of lay leadership in moving us forward in these areas.

The goal is not a right answer, but a good conversation. We won’t come up with answers, plans, or strategies. Instead, we hope to simply raise ideas that can be shared with Pastor Brent, who is also spending time on this topic, when he returns.

Question #2 – How does the purpose of church show up, inform, relate to, or impact the relationships with one another within the church?

– Sunday November 14 (in-person at church 1:30-3:00 or via zoom 7:00-8:30)

Our first session began with the question, “Why?” or “What is our church for?” The question invited us to consider church as a verb: not something that we attend but something that we do.

Answers to that question included a range of activities:

- Our church is “community-in-formation”: people gathering in order to worship, to develop relationships of depth, and to be shaped by our shared experience of the holy.
- Our church is a “community host”: a place and a people who intentionally make space for those seeking community, and for groups of our neighbors to pursue their own artistic, social, and educational aims.
- Our church is a “sanctuary”: a physical place and the activity that maintains that place as holy, set apart for meaningful encounters with the spirit in us and beyond us.
- Our church is a “locus of innovation”: a people who continually seek refreshed ways of connecting deeply with one another and of welcoming neighbors and newcomers.
- Our church is a “locus of continuity”: a people who honor, remember, and re-enact

traditions of spiritual practice and spiritual arts that have been developed over millennia.

- Our church is a “locus of service”: a people who gather to sharpen and deepen our work for the well-being of our wider community.
- Our church is a “gathering for renewal and reformation”: examining ourselves and our community; learning from Christ Jesus and prophets and teachers what needs reinforcement and how God would lead us to change.

Given those responses to the question “What is our church for?” we now turn to the second question: “How does the **purpose of church** show up, inform, relate to, or impact the **relationships with one another** within the church?”

Our second question invites us to reflect on the state of our relationships within our church community. Where do we see the purposes of church influencing us? How are our relationships supporting the purposes of our church? We invite you to this next stage of our discussion, trusting that it will be rich with appreciation for ways that the “why” of church becomes real in our relationships.