

Sabbatical Sessions

The UCC offers this guidance, “Sabbaticals are times of refreshment, nourishment, and refocusing ministry for both a minister and a congregation.”¹ 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. We will provide a framing for the question as well as some support materials. We invite you to read those 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 #1 – What is church for? - Sunday October 17

Tim Sorens in his book [Everywhere You Look: Discovering the Church Right Where You Are](#), offers a simple but profound observation. He contends that too often when we think about the life and vitality of church, we ask questions about what church is or how to fix it rather than asking the harder question of what it is for. He points out how different the question “what marriage is” feels than “what is marriage for?”.

Sorens’ perspective is that church is not something that we simply go to (like a concert, ballgame, or picnic) but rather something that we become and if we are to become something it is good to know toward what end or why. The vision that Sorens offers is one of relationship, movement, justice, life (both messy and beautiful) and becoming (p 17). When done well, he continues, it is something not entirely of our doing, but joined with what God is already doing.

Sorens calls what we are asking you to consider “the big why.” That question is “What is the church for?” or perhaps phrased differently, “What is the point of church? or Why are we doing this?” (p. 22) We want to ask that question specifically about our church.

Our first question invites each of us beyond what we do or even how we do it to the more foundational purpose of why. We invite you to let go and allow yourself to consider the purpose behind this enterprise we invest so much of ourselves as well as our time, treasure, and talent in.

¹ This comes from a UCC Resource, “A Sure Foundation” and can be found on page 41.