



August 19, 2009

Roxbury Congregational Church
24 Church St.
Roxbury, CT. 06783

Dear Charles, Heidi and Greg:

It was good to have a chance to talk to all of you on the telephone this week. Thank you for the opportunity to learn more about your concerns and hopes for the Church. This letter summarizes and confirms our understanding of the discussions we've had. It can also serve as a contract if you wish to proceed with this project.

What I heard from you...

In our brief conversations, I understand that you have recently experienced painful conflict in the life of the church. Some in the congregation have expressed deep differences with the pastor and have become less active as a result. Others have demonstrated continued loyalty and appreciation for the ministry of the pastor. As a result, you have invited the Litchfield South Association Committee on Church and Ministry to conduct an assessment of the congregation. After talking to you and reading the report of the Committee, I propose the following work for your congregation.

Our proposed approach

1. We propose an approach that begins with the creation of a **“core group”** of 12 individuals representative of the breadth of voices within the congregation to lead the project on behalf of the Church.

2. Once this group has been created, we will gather background information by conducting brief **one-on-one telephone interviews** of core group members and the pastor.
3. Over the subsequent five to six months, we will **facilitate a series of three-hour sessions**, combining the training and practice of communication skills, while identifying, prioritizing and working together to address the key issues facing the Church at this time.
4. As the core group learns new skills and develops its own "relational covenant," it **brings those new insights and attitudes to the work at hand and introduces them into the life of the congregation**. This approach enables a congregation to learn new communication and peace-making skills as it deals with the current issues and opportunities facing the Church.
5. At the end of the third phase of the project, we will **assist the group in summarizing its learnings and suggestions in a “plan for moving forward.”**
6. As we agree on a plan to address the issues identified, **we will facilitate a series of meetings to move the plan into the life of the congregation**. This part of the engagement is intentionally undefined in order to meet the needs of the congregation specifically as the project unfolds.
7. During the scope of the project, we will provide **one-on-one coaching assistance to the pastor**. A more detailed description of the proposed project is attached.



***“Walking in the Way”—
A detailed description of a program for
Roxbury Congregational Church
August , 2009***

Phase One----month one

To initiate this project, a “core” group of 12 individuals is assembled who broadly represent the variety of demographics, interests, range of viewpoints and backgrounds within the congregation. The core group also includes the pastor. This group is invited to participate in a five-six month process to address the issues at hand. Group members are asked to contribute their own views, as well as to bring the perspective of the interests they represent to the group's dialogue. Based on our conversation, you may choose to invite one or two parishioners who are now inactive, but who may be interested in becoming reactivated. Core group members should also be willing to listen to other’s perspectives, though they might not necessarily agree.

We interview each core group member in order to elicit an assessment of what is important to them, what is working well, and what ideas they have for improvement. In addition, we review any existing materials or other relevant information, including existing plans or reports. Our goal is to be as thorough as possible in identifying the concerns of all those involved and incorporate thoughts and ideas from individuals in good 'congregational' style, while making the best use of our time together. Specific information gained from interviews is summarized and woven into our sessions; individual comments are kept anonymous and used only in a non-attributional, summarized fashion.

Phase Two -----months two-six

Using information gathered above, we facilitate a series of three-hour “core group” sessions, scheduled at least two weeks apart to allow time for reflection and communication to and from the congregation as the project progresses. Initially, I recommend two core group sessions and six congregational meetings.

The sessions address critical issues raised in the interviews as we:

- *Introduce a 'relational covenant';*
- *Deepen understanding the range of viewpoints expressed by the congregation;*
- *Teach new skills for listening, transforming conflict, and maintaining healthy dialogue;*

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- *Build consensus and generate creative solutions; and*
- *Develop a plan for sharing new skills, insights, and recommendations with the congregation.*

We facilitate all sessions using a variety of creative teaching and group processing techniques. All discussion is documented during our time together. Session summaries and all other session materials are provided. We suggest the summaries be distributed to other interested parties shortly after each session. You may also wish to display summaries and other materials from our work together throughout the process for other members of the congregation to read, and, at some point, open the “core” group sessions to all those interested.

In addition, we will meet with the pastor regularly throughout the project.

During the course of the project, we will also assist the group in reaching out to other members of the congregation. Our involvement in such activities may include facilitation of church-wide meetings, opening core group sessions to any who are interested, joining the group as they work with committees or other small groups, and providing ad hoc support as they involve others in the congregation in the process.

Phase Three----months five-six

As the project reaches its conclusion, we assist the core group to summarize its learnings, insights and recommendations into a “Suggested Plan for Moving Forward.” We also work closely with members of the group to ensure that the dialogue continues, issues that have been identified are not lost in the process, and new skills and suggestions are communicated to the congregation and to other appropriate bodies of the Church for further consideration, decision, or implementation.

Throughout the project, we will remain in communication with lay leadership, and we will be available for ad hoc telephone or e-mail support of the group, as needed.

Phase Three----month seven-eight

During the course of the work, we often discover that certain kinds of training or other resourcing is needed in order to restore and renew the good health of the congregation. This could be pastoral relations training or training in evaluation. It could be mediation. It could be an additional session with the congregation. We intentionally don’t specify what is needed at this point because it is usually determined by the direction the congregation moves as we progress in the process.

About the team...

The Rev. Dr. Beverly Prestwood-Taylor Beverly's 25 years of experience serving churches in Michigan and Massachusetts combined with her training in facilitation and in the theory and practice of conflict management give her a pragmatic approach to church life. She helps churches see beyond the problems to the possibilities, and coaches them in developing concrete skills and structures for transforming conflicts. She specializes in cultivating healthy relationships between the pastor and the parish, in teaching the skills necessary for preventing destructive conflict, and in facilitating a healing process in churches recovering from destructive conflict. In 1983, she received a Masters of Divinity from Boston University School of Theology and is ordained in the United Church of Christ. Schooled in Community Conflict Mediation and Training through Plowshares Institute in Hartford, CT., she has recently completed a Doctor of Ministry at Hartford Seminary with distinction, focusing on conflict transformation. Beverly is the executive director of the Brookfield Institute, a center for healing the person, the community and the earth, located in Brookfield, MA.



Bonnie J. Marden

Bonnie facilitates and teaches groups to confront conflict and discover constructive energy for growth, discipleship and healing. Her training encompasses mediation, intervention and dialogue skills which she loves teaching in experiential and interactive settings. Called to the ministry of reconciliation, she believes the restoration of our relationships with others is critical to our relationship with God. With thirteen years experience as a Parish Consultant specializing in conflict and transitions for the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church, she joined the Walking in the Way team in 2006. Trained in mediation through the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, she is a member of the JustPeace Center for Peace and Reconciliation. Her background in finance, economics and program administration proved useful in lay-leadership roles on local church Pastor Parish Relations, Finance and Worship committees in the United Methodist Church. She has taught leadership workshops and conflict and church administration classes at Boston University School of Theology. Degrees in political science and economics (Tufts University) have familiarized her with the political realities of denominational decision-making and nurtured a life-long search for grace in communities of faith.