

**Visionary Shared Leadership is the Key**

*by Rev. Dr. Tom Chulak, Acting District Executive for the Ohio Meadville District*

For the past eight months I have had the chance to get to know many of the congregations in the Ohio Meadville District, and I am impressed by the number of them that are vital, healthy, and growing.

As I work with congregations, it is clear that there are many factors that make them vibrant and exciting. These include good space, good programs, and good relationships among the people. Even though these are important, I have found that the key to having a healthy, growing congregation is visionary shared leadership, both lay and professional.

Some congregations may have excellent leadership but not a shared vision; or perhaps the leaders have not found a way to work together. In these cases, the congregation will suffer.

When a minister and the president of the congregation are working together for a common vision, you can feel it. When a staff team is in harmony with one another, you can feel it. When a leadership team connects with each other and the congregation, you can feel it. And good feelings are a sign of good health. And health leads to vitality. And vitality leads to growth.

**What is a vision?**

A vision is a preferred future that informs our priorities and actions. It is grounded in our history and values, and it stretches our imagination and calls us into new ways of being. Vision opens us up and gives us new energy. It gives us hope.

While vision is critical, it is also true that we must live in the present. To live as if the future is already present is the key to new life.

As human beings with consciousness, we live in duration, aware of the past, the present, and the future. But ultimately, all we have is the present. Our present is enlivened if we can draw upon both our strengths from the past and our vision of the future. Too much focus on “what has been” leads to stagnation, and too much focus on “what is to come” leaves us anxious.

So leaders need to be in the present, informed by the past, and open to a compelling vision of the future. Leaders need to be able to work with each other and the congregations they are called to serve. **Shared leadership, grounded in shared ministry and called by a deep desire to serve, is what makes congregations come alive.**

All congregations have the potential to be vital and growing, but that will not happen without leaders – leaders who know where they came from, where they are now, and where they are heading. When the continuum of “past, present, and future” coincides with faithful, Unitarian Universalist, value-based leadership, congregations come alive.

I love our congregations and our democratic faith. At times we lose our way or forget our mission, but yet, there is always new life in our midst. May we find it, grow it, and share it. Not only will we be blessed, but so will the larger whole of which we are a part.

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