

Report to the UUTC Board  
Rev. Bob Renjilian  
January 2022 (including December period)

PERSONAL:

- My whole family attended both of the UUTC Christmas Eve Services. I am grateful to John Austin and the Choir for all they have done through the holidays, especially while trying to be safe during COVID-19. And to the family who had a real baby Jesus. And to the AV crew, and Vanessa's decorating. And the attendance. This was a boost to my morale, and I was so glad to share UUTC at the holidays with my family.
- I was able to participate in the (online) Gay Men's Chorus holiday concert. We recorded it live in front of a videographer, much better than previous styles of recording (such as Acapella app we used to use for music at UUTC). Also I sang in Biltmore Village during the holiday festivals, on street corners and the concert at the gazebo with the Barbershop Chorus. Again, a boost to morale.
- I didn't get to visit Christy in Pennsylvania in January, due to weather travel hazards those weekends I was out of the pulpit. This was the antithesis of a morale boost. Yuk. The snow was pretty though! Original plans for a February guest speaker fell through, but I'm working to find one and I'll try again for a trip north one weekend.
- I will be participating in "Singing Valentines" this year, with a Barbershop Quartet. It is a traditional fundraiser that couldn't happen last year due to COVID.
- My health continues to be good.

REFLECTION ON "NEXT NORMAL"

Back in November the big deal was re-emergence of choir in services. In December this was particularly appreciated through the holidays, and we even allowed singing of the carols by the congregation on Christmas Eve. Then as Omicron came, there were concerns about singing - and the decision to be safe was a good one. We remain flexible. As I type this it appears Transylvania County may be at the peak of the wave, so things will get better. But in the meantime folks like the choice of live/hybrid.

There was a question about more COVID-19 guidance as Omicron arrived. My advice to group leaders was to get a sense of their members and adjust plans accordingly. That meant some groups moving to be online only for a few weeks, or reducing their time together (as Choir did in eliminating a mid-week rehearsal and using Sunday warmup instead). Other groups kept going. Staff families were facing various COVID-19 questions and it made sense to shift working hours and ask people to call ahead for appointments. The flexibility and invention of options is important to make this a “CANdemic” (a word I learned at leadership training this month). I commend what Kevin Lausch has offered parents of OWL - the sleepover being on-site with our HVAC system running on high (I have confidence in our air handling system, and I know the dust filters were just cleaned/changed throughout the building so the best air flow is a result) with the option that a student could sleep at home instead. Other, smaller, adjustments make sense: I have upgraded to an N95 mask, and a few KN95 masks have been added to the pile available in the lobby (we have a donated supply of the regular disposable masks as well, and child-sized options).

#### ADULT RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION:

I led the Soul Matters discussion group in December (“Joy”) and January . We were entirely via Zoom for January.

I also led the second session of the “Poetry and Meditation” class. We have four registered. I love the class, and it is energizing to be able to do the discussions in-person in our lobby, with spacing between us and the fresh air system on high.

#### COMMUNITY SERVICE:

I met with the Rainbow Alliance for their January meeting. We met the student leader of the Brevard College campus LGBTQ group. I am glad we could open our building to such meetings. There are rumors that the Blue Ridge Pride center wants to assist Transylvania County LGBTQ folks and maybe launch a Brevard Pride event this year.

I attended the ASIST suicide prevention training in January, held at the Election Center conference room. This was an upgrade to the type of “mental health first aid” training I’d received years ago. There were three UUTC people among the group of participants, the other two were Stacey Seefeldt and Jim Hardy. There were school staffs represented, law enforcement, and others. I am glad the community is responding in positive ways to address the teen suicides, and overall all-age danger of suicide. I thank Eloise Shepard of our UUTC staff for responding positively to the community request to place one of the supportive road signs along the main road at our property (I went out there after the snows and cleaned the road salt off a bit).

#### PASTORAL CARE:

I have made phone calls, been available to talk with members, and met with LHHH. I note that my usual monthly outreach to the UUs at College Walk did not happen in December, but the lock-down ended in time for us to meet again in January.

For the Grief Group (and any others in the community) the Vespers service “Somber Holidays” (aka “Grief at the Holidays”) on Sunday, Dec. 5, was a new offering at UUTC. I am consulting with Sharon Gublo to determine how the group might proceed as we exit Omicron.

I find some folks need far more assistance than I (or LHHH) can handle. We are not set up to offer daily rides, for example - but a work-around might be taxi or Uber gift certificates paid for by the Ministers Discretionary Fund. We have congregants who need respite from providing very intensive home care, and I’m somewhat at a loss of how to help fill gaps.

#### FINANCIAL REFLECTIONS:

Thanks to Gail and RK for working on W-2 forms, especially since the new payroll company doesn’t quite get things right the easy way, or the first time. It’s all good, and after all the hassle things will be better. This would not be the first time I’ve had to file taxes with a revised W-2. The cost of COVID-19 tests for the Choir went up \$2.50 per singer, so it is about \$10 per chorister per Sunday in service. As the wave declines (and people’s fears recede a bit), I will be surveying Choir and

congregation to figure out if the cost is giving the boost to participation and overall attendance that we sought, or if this experiment is better left behind. I am open to other options and insight from you as Board before I get around to doing those surveys.

I am not going to spend all my professional expenses. I was to have attended the UU Ministers Association institute next week in California. Due to COVID, I'm attending from my home office over Zoom. Much cheaper. But there may be meetings that do happen away from NC as spring approaches, so I'll use some of it.

I may be converting my home cell phone plan to one that better itemizes the basic cost for each phone. I will then start itemizing and submitting the basic fee for the phone I use for church, and turn that in as reimbursement. I'm slow at such transitions, so it may be a while. Expected cost \$25/month.

We paid more for a guest preacher this month. Our UUTC general guide for paying UU Ministers is not in alignment with the just-before-pandemic guidelines. We didn't have a problem when we were just online, but now we should be meeting the general expectations of the guidelines for UU Congregations. The worship team has discussed this and may make adjustments.

#### OTHER MEETINGS:

I have coordinated with John Austin on live music for Sunday services, and with Janice Canon for recorded Sundays. I've coordinated with Vanessa Cowie, worship team, and worship associates as well. When an ordained guest speaker is in the pulpit (as was the case in January two times) I had also reached out to those speakers (and in one case offered "backup" if weather was going to threaten travel).

I have checked in with Doug and Kathryn about AV needs.

Leader meetings: I met by phone with Bart Renner, in person and electronically with RK Young and also Staff meetings. I have checked in with Social Action leadership and any other group leaders as needed. I contacted Kristin Leesment to ask if she would lead again, and then (with others) extended invitations to people to join the Pledge Drive team and have attended the first two meetings of that group as we gear up.

The biggest part about leadership this month was a workshop I attended on behalf of my Barbershop Chorus. They have regional online workshops for incoming or continuing leaders (it was to have been in-person, but we're glad COVID moved it to online because it happened on one of the snow days). I will report more as an appendix to this report, but it is where I learned the word "CANdemic" - which encapsulates the idea that we can find ways to get through, around, and over the obstacles that arise in the "Next Normal" of COVID-19 waves. Overall, those choruses that tried new ways of meeting and meeting their mission were doing better than those who felt they had no options (or that it was useless to try). The national leadership on the Zoom meeting was most impressed by those who were finding successes, and told us it was helping retain members. I extrapolate that to what we're doing at UUTC - at the same time we're balancing safety and participation, we're keeping our eye on the long range (such as the re-zoning of the property so we can meet our goals and mission) as well as the current needs. Yes we can!

#### WIDER UU MOVEMENT:

I met with a subgroup of the Unitarian Universalist Association Religious Education Credentialing Committee (on Zoom) as we envision how to improve our anti-racism initiatives. I am please to be of service to the wider movement. COVID-permitting, we will be gathering in-person this spring to help RE professionals reach their credential goals.

#### GRATITUDE:

For RK. Always on top of things, always responsive, and makes good suggestions for how I can add to my ministry.

For Kevin for doggedly persevering with CRE offerings despite the unknowns of attendance, and kudos for figuring out how to offer OWL in the midst of COVID-19. We had 16 of 17 teens at the first session of OWL this month, and hope that all 17 will be present for the sleepover.

For Amy and Eloise for the many extras they've been doing and the flexibility in their being present in the building.

For our AV Tech crew, Doug and Katherine, whose December schedule was near impossible during the Solstice / Christmas Eve stretch. And who rearranged their schedules to record an entire service in advance to have it "in the can" before the snow arrived. We didn't miss a beat!

For the people who show up to church, come to meetings, reach out to people in need (especially LHHH who seem to be busy with that always), and lend a hand around the grounds.

And as always, I am grateful to all of you on the Board, for leadership during these strange times is not “business as usual.”

## LEADERSHIP NOTES APPENDIX

From a Barbershopper Training attended by Rev. Bob Renjilian

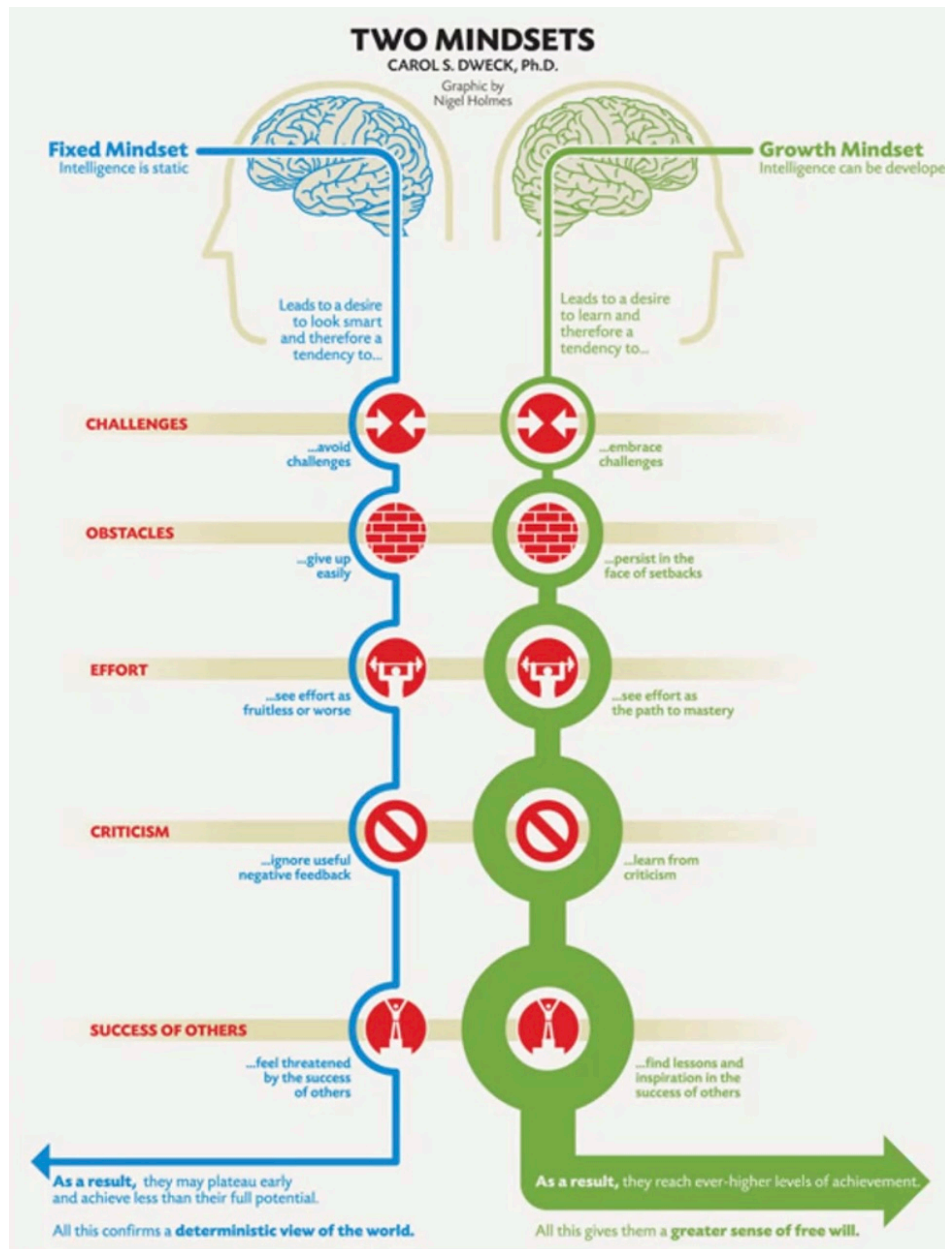
I am now Secretary of the Board for the Asheville chorus. This is a bigger deal than just typing and posting minutes. We got a weekend immersion in leadership training, not just task training. Some of this is relevant to any voluntary organization, including church!

A portion of this is drawn from Carol Dweck: <https://fs.blog/carol-dweck-mindset/>

A part of the work of a congregation is to help people find the spiritual grounding that allows a better chance that personal growth and church growth will happen. Some of this means overcoming mindsets that might get in the way. Leaders have a role in helping people feel they have the tools and support to meet challenges. Empowering and Equipping. Also this means embracing the idea that FAIL stands for “first attempt in learning” - not something bad, just a step to something good. We, as leaders need to remember to go outside our comfort and really be ready to stretch, to fail, to avoid trying to look good. If the leaders are vulnerable, real, and able to stretch then the congregation will too.

In our chorus, for example, we want to raise the level of our skill and performance. This includes a try-out process, where each of us auditions the song. The leaders start first. They get the music before the chorus does, and they audition before they ask members to audition. They are allowed to make mistakes, to receive feedback and constructive criticism (along with encouragement), and in return they do the same for the chorus members.

One of the things we were told was this pandemic has broken the inertia of “how we’ve always done it” and the roles in the group too. Boards no longer need a VP of Music, a VP of Performances, or other named positions - we need to see about portable sound crew coordination or as yet not imagined leader roles. In a church that means starting a COVID Reopening Task Force, or deciding to have paid children’s leadership. “We’ve never done that before” is not something I hear at UUTC, except as a curiosity that might indicate an openness to exploring more. This is very good, and puts this congregation at the growing side of UU trends.



I am hoping our September retreat at the Mountain will allow us to envision. We may need to invent other ways to do that though, between now and then!

A few talking points about leaders:

Leaders have a vision and can translate that into reality

(So many examples at UUTC, from the Author series to the IRS filing work!)

Leaders have a driving passion to realize their vision.

(What do you need from me to unlock that for you?)

Leaders build trust.

(Yup. Not by being a know-it-all, but by speaking truth and in concert)

Leaders unleash motivation and don't do it all themselves.

(When it seems easier to do it yourself, ask if it is better to equip someone else for long-term leadership health).

Leaders are Social and Organizational architects.

(Notice you got the LHHH updated scope document)

Leaders act from positive beliefs about people.

(We don't try to "own the libs" or talk down here, and I appreciate that)

Leaders have an action plan for their next steps

(Gotta review that this year)

Leaders practice intelligent engagement, not attachment.

(Not tied to outcomes - things should be oriented to the mission and flexibility given the congregation's assets (like what people bring in skill and energy) not a particular sense of "this is how it should be")

Barbershop Leaders are Fearless in their pursuit of MORE SINGING

(Hmmm, how would we as leaders translate this to UUTC?)

Some proposed conditions of success:

Come prepared to work

Show up and Choose to be present.

Listen to Understand (not to argue)... Inquire (ask) before you advocate (persuade).

Respect each other's opinions, even in the face of disagreement.

Listen from the "We" but speak from the "I" (not "you")

Strive to honor brainstorming without being attached to your own viewpoint.

Attack the problem (or I'd say "challenge/opportunity"), not the person.

Have fun! (Yes it's possible)