

# All Souls

## Religious Education Discernment Team

November 29, 2012

In September of 2012, the All Souls Board of Trustees created a Discernment Team (DT) to investigate the possibilities of replacing the Director of Religious Education who left All Souls this past July. Since his departure the position was filled temporarily by an ordained minister. This decision seems to have had such a positive impact on the program that the Board believed an examination of the leadership of RE would be a worthwhile endeavor.

The DT consisted of a cross section of the congregation: Denise Davies, Laurel Holmes, Tracey Rose and George Dowker, representing parents who have children in RE, RE teachers and past Board members who have studied Board Governance and are very familiar with the All Souls Long Range Plan. Because of their backgrounds the team had a broad perspective, understood the needs of RE and were keenly aware of the Long Range Plan and governance issues.

The Board's charge to the Discernment Team was:

- Look at potential staffing models for RE (i.e. Minister of RE with RE administrator, traditional DRE, etc.)
- Consider the current model with Reverend Caitlin serving as Minister of RE
- What needs are we trying to meet
- Consider our history of RE Directors (Sandy, Perry, Nathan)
- Based on the information collected in response to the four points above, make a recommendation as to which model would be best

**Process:** Using the All Souls Long Range Plan as a guide and recognizing that team member George Dowker had attended a majority of last winter's Cottage Gatherings giving him a broad understanding of the congregation's concerns and hopes, the following steps were taken:

- The DT began by listening to and interviewing its members who teach in and who have children in the RE program, asking them to compare and contrast the RE program as it is this year with that of the past and gauging their level of satisfaction;
- Members then informally interviewed congregants with children asking similar questions, giving them the opportunity to provide feedback;
- The team then met with Reverend Patierno to discuss her perceptions as well as the information gathered through the interview process;

**Findings:** Without exception, the DT found that congregants with children in RE, RE teachers, and Carolyn expressed appreciation for a series of elements of the current program, including:

- A clear spiritual quality that had not been present in the program previously;
- A sense of calm that affects the students positively;
- An extremely well-organized program, giving students the opportunity to learn and the teachers the planning and tools they need;
- The opportunity to provide feedback and input on programmatic decisions on a higher level, clarifying that input was being solicited rather than just accepted;
- Special needs and family issues are being addressed within the program and at a very high level;

- Some of the concerns and workload previously shouldered by Carolyn are now being handled by Reverend Caitlyn.

### **Other Considerations**

The DT also considered other forces that would impact our recommendation. For example: the Board and Carolyn's recognition that the congregation must become more nimble and able to react to our changing environment more quickly. Another aspect is the Long Range Plan, which should guide any recommendation. Additionally George Dowker noted that one of the overriding comments from the Cottage Gatherings was the concern that we were going to burn the minister out. Many congregants expressed the concern that we get Carolyn the help that she needs to continue her successful ministry of All Souls. This became especially apparent to us this past year. Indeed this is an item that has been long identified in recent Long Range Plans.

### **Initial Recommendation**

The RE Discernment Team believes that a Minister of RE with a RE Administrator would be the right choice for All Souls and strongly recommends that the All Souls Board of Trustees pursue that course of action.

### **Additional Clarification & Final Recommendation**

The DT is concerned that while a Minister of RE with a RE Administrator would have many positive outcomes; it could also lock the congregation into a long-term position which might not allow the administration the critical flexibility to effectively react to changes in environment. Additionally, there were valid concerns expressed that such a position is not a part of the Long Range Plan and that it did not rise up as a priority during last year's Cottage gatherings.

Therefore while the creation of an MRE position would provide Carolyn with some support, the DT has come to the conclusion that a better direction would be the creation of an Associate Minister position, with an initial focus on young families and RE, who would serve under the charge of the Senior Minister.

Such a position is in sync with the congregation's Cottage gathering feedback (which included a strong concern that the congregation provide proper staff support for Carolyn for a congregation the size of ours). It is included in the current Long Range Plan; allows the congregation to be more nimble as the Senior Minister could assign the Associate to the tasks best as new priorities are identified; and would not lock the congregation into a permanent MRE position.

The DT also recognizes that in creating an Associate Minister position, this individual would likely not be able to perform the full-range of critical administrative tasks needed for an effective RE program, while also serving as an Associate Minister. Therefore, as with the MRE, the DT further recommends that an RE administrator position be created to manage and accomplish those lower level tasks at approximately 10 hours per week.

In conclusion, the RE Discernment Team believes that an Associate Minister assigned to RE would:

- Provide qualified staff with whom Carolyn can share the ministerial load
- Attract families with children
- Increase congregational growth
- Impact and increase the sustaining and retention of members
- Increase growth of RE
- Support RE & Carolyn by ministering directly to families with children
- Support Carolyn by preaching occasionally

Respectfully submitted,  
RE Discernment Team