

The 20 people listed below attended the Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop at the UUC in Augusta on 11/4/2023. Paul attended via Zoom from Ghana and our facilitator was Rev. Jane Dwinell who attended from Vermont on Zoom.

Stef Barley, Nan Bell, Angie Blevins, Hal Booth, Harold Burnett, Jim Caldwell, Sara Hodgkins, Priscilla Jenkins, Kevin Kane, Mary Kane, Carolyn Ladd, Michaela Loisel, Debbie Mattson, Dale McCormick, Lori Milner, Paul Matondo, Martha Nabor, Cheryl Ring, June Zellers

We had a 90-minute session in the morning and broke for lunch (provided by our Social Justice Committee), then met for 90 minutes after lunch. Five Search Committee members attended and 4 Board members and several Social Justice members as well as members and friends.

Jane led us by having a discussion of our Wufoo forms and summarized that we are a “normal” congregation in our answers which were like nationwide profiles. Compared to 10 or 15 years ago we are significantly less questioning the ability of different genders, races, or disabilities in various roles in the church or wherever.

Then we broke into 4 groups each focusing on a different topic: How would we have lived or felt differently if we were a different gender, different sexual orientation, different physical or mental ability, etc. When we met again each group shared how different our lives would be and in what ways. It was very enlightening to hear different ideas of the ways our lives would have changed.

We had a wonderful lunch, and many kept discussing the morning topics during lunch.

After lunch we broke into 4 groups again to discuss cases. Each group chose 2 or 3 cases out of the 30 case histories suggested by the UUA. It was interesting for us to have Paul’s perspective from Ghana because of his county’s different traditions and culture from ours and because we currently have no other black or non-white church attendees besides Paul (Paul regularly attends our services via Box cast).

Most groups seemed to come to some consensus about their cases and in what ways to handle the presented situations best or better. But two groups did discuss Case 26 about Class and location and came to different conclusions. One group said they would welcome a “working class” minister who could relate better to our neighbors in our church location and the other group said that our congregation is largely middle class and may have problems accepting a working-class minister. Otherwise, the groups tended to think we could accept ministers with diverse races, disabilities, and gender differences as long as the ministers were successfully coping with those differences themselves.

We were grateful for our time together sharing and creating new ways of thinking about our goal to be a more diverse and accepting church.