

Unitarian Universalists of Harrisonburg

Congregational Retreat
November 14, 2009

The Task of Religious Community

The central task of religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice.

It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength is limited to do all that must be done. Together our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

Mark Morrison-Reed

I Must Do These Things

Hugh Prather

I must do these things in order to communicate:

Become aware of you (discover you).

Make you aware of me (uncover myself).

Be ready to change during our conversation, and be willing to reveal my changes to you.

For communication to have meaning it must have a life. It must transcend "you and me" and become "us."

If I truly communicate, I see in you a life that is not me and partake of it. And you see and partake of me.

In a small way we then grow out of our old selves and become something new.

To have this kind of sharing I cannot enter a conversation clutching myself. I must give myself to the relationship, and be willing to be what grows out of it.

ALL

To have this kind of sharing I cannot enter a conversation clutching myself. I must give myself to the relationship, and be willing to be what grows out of it.

I Am Willing

Holly Near

I am open and I am willing
To be hopeless would seem so strange
It dishonors those who go before us
So lift me up to the light of change

There is hurting in my family
There is sorrow in my town
There is panic in the nation
There is wailing the whole world round

May the children see more clearly
May the elders be more wise
May the winds of change caress us
Even though it burns our eyes

Give me a mighty oak to hold my confusion
Give me a desert to hold my fears
Give me a sunset to hold my wonder
Give me an ocean to hold my tears

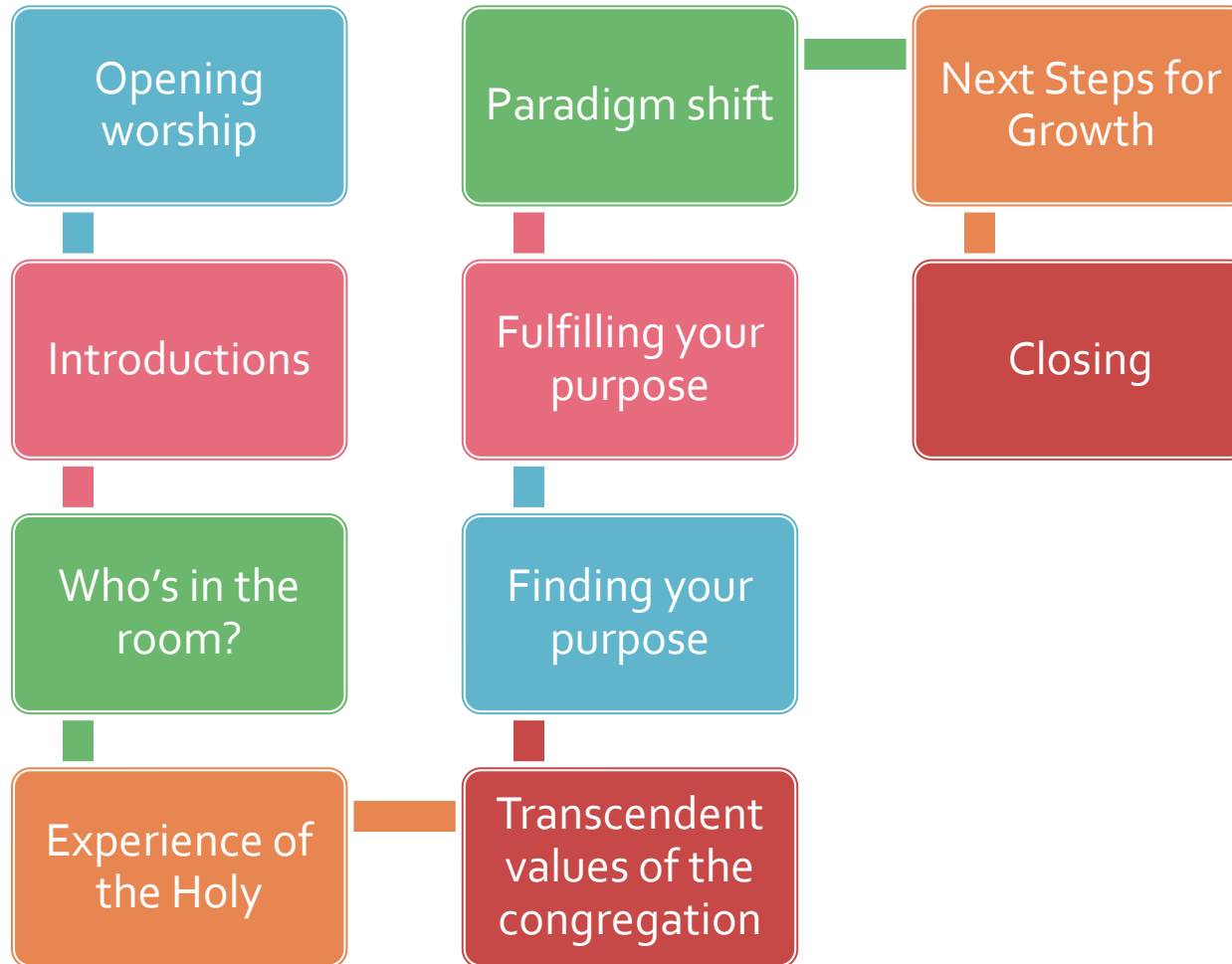
Retreat Goal



To bring clarity to your
transcendent purpose as
a congregation

and how to fulfill it

Agenda



Experience of the Holy

Tell a story about your experience of the holy, a time when you felt connected to something larger than yourself, a time when you felt your heart and mind expand?

When did your story happen? Who was there? What happened? What made this experience holy for you?

What values are embedded in your stories? What qualities of your experience are key to the experience being holy? Does the story speak to an underlying value such as independence? Reverence? Empowerment? Authenticity? Wonder? Freedom? Generosity? Identify 1-3 key values.

Typical Church

- UUs of East Cupcake have a retreat and come up with a tons of great ideas.
- The Board develops a plan to try to implement those ideas.
- Leaders go off to a district training and as a result, come up with more great ideas.
- More and more ideas are tried.
- This goes on for several years until they have programs stacked onto programs stacked onto programs. None of them are all that effective. The people are tired. The energy is diffused. There is no direction or progress. The church is going no where. People are busier than every, but there is little progress.

Simple Church

Thom S. Rainer & Eric Geiger

Congregations develop one clear statement of purpose

- Eg.
 - Love God, love people, love the world
 - Connecting, Growing, Serving
- Everything is organized around that statement.
- As people develop their faith, they move through the congregation's purpose to find their own.

Simple Church

1. Design a simple process

Ask the questions: what are we trying to do, and how are we trying to do it. Think steps. Make sure the steps are logical and not too far apart. Begin with a blank piece of paper. Don't try to cram all your existing programming into this process. Talk it through with various groups in the church--lots of groups. Take your time. Design a simple process and keep it simple.

2. Place your key programs along this process

Hopefully, much of what you are doing now will fit into the process. Choose one church-wide program for each phase of the process. Consider how preschoolers, children and youth are affected.

3. Unite all ministries around the process

The more people are involved in the conversations about this, the better it will go. People are down on what they are not up on, as Rick Warren says it.

4. Begin to eliminate things outside the process

OK, this is where the changes are REALLY felt. Everyone believes in a balanced budget, but no one wants their line item cut. Everyone agrees we need a simple process, but they don't want their program eliminated. Take your time. Use your best people skills. Explain, discuss, involve. If yours is an older, tradition-rich church, you may have to allow some exceptions for some time to come. But, keep some forward motion toward simplicity.

Key Tasks of HUU

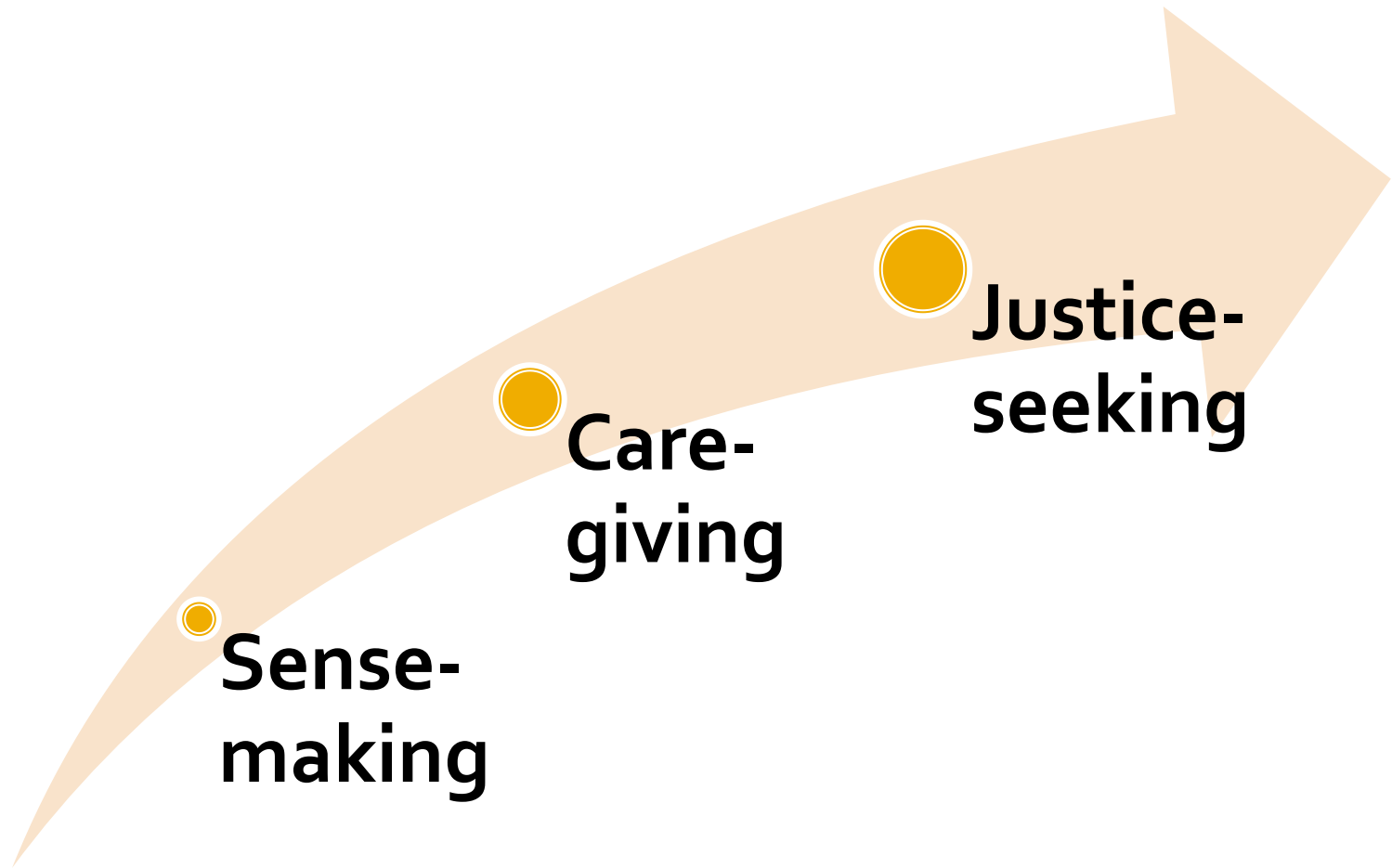
We remind ourselves that the three key tasks of this religious community are:

Sense-making, helping each other to find the truths in our lives and in the world;

Care-giving, helping each other through the hard times and celebrating the good times;

Justice-seeking, trying to leave this community and the world a better place for us having been here.

Key Tasks of HUU



Next Steps for Growth

1. **Spiritual Growth:** Ministry, Sunday services, spiritual practices, personal growth
2. **Programmatic Growth:** Children's RE, Adult RE, Music program, Fellowship Activities
3. **Leadership Growth:** Committee structures, board work, communication, leadership development within the congregation, marketing, membership
4. **Community Presence:** Social justice, environmental justice, interfaith activities, financial support for community agencies/non-profits.



Sense-making

Care-giving

Justice-seeking

Next Steps for Growth

1. What do we do that is aligned with our key tasks? What are we doing we should continue doing? What do we do well?
2. Is there anything we do that is not?
3. If we were to simplify, what is one congregation-wide program that aligns with each step in the purpose?



