

**Report for the Harrisonburg, VA UU Church
Congregation Retreat
November 5, 2006**

Approx. 20 people were present for the afternoon gathering.

After introductions and a check-in, we went over the history and organizational structure of the congregation.

People shared the **Strengths/Gifts** of the congregation:

Lay-led worship

The people

Commitment to Unitarian Universalism

New organizational model

Generosity of spirit

Opportunity for personal growth

Then they shared the **Challenges**:

Pastoral care

Disagreement about whether or not to have a minister

Finding focus

Concerns about leadership and what it means

How to be/do everything when small

Keeping members/visitors/friends

Coping with conflict

Accountability/responsibility

Two pressing issues arose:

Growth – why grow? How big should we be?

Professional ministry – should we have a minister or not?

Growth: (people shared the following)

Why grow?

More people to do things

More programming – adult RE, kids and teens

This is an important place

More voice in larger community

Could afford a half-time minister

More money

Joy of meeting new people

Why not?

Lose relationships and intimacy

Have to decide about the building

Lose joys and concerns

Fear of having to be more inclusive

Professional ministry: (people shared the following)

Pros –

Consistent voice to larger community

Consistency in the pulpit

Pastoral care

Someone to watch out for problems

Cons –

Don't have the money

There might be personality conflicts

They would tell us what to do

UUA rules

We discussed the myths, stereotypes, and facts around growth, size, pastoral care, professional ministry, and consensus decision-making (formal and informal) vs. the democratic process. Examples: No congregation *has* to grow, and there is no optimal size. It takes about 125 active members in worship to afford a full time minister, and currently that costs at least \$60,000 (including professional expenses and benefits). More money and more people to do the work are not reasons to grow – it may or may not happen. Sharing our faith and enhancing our congregational life are reasons to grow. Intimacy need not be lost with growth (along with joys and concerns) but it may have to be done differently. Be creative! There is room on the property for expansion if necessary. If you know what you want a professional minister to do for you, there is less opportunity for conflict or a feeling that the minister is “telling you what to do.”

There was the feeling that it would be OK to grow to 100 members at this time (at 10% growth per year). Greater Harrisonburg, demographically, has the potential for 500-1000 UUs.

It was reinforced that the congregation has to get their house in order (through the Three M's: Ministry, Mission and Maintenance) before considering professional ministry.

Recommendations:

Ministry:

Sunday morning:

Acquire a new sound system with standing mic for joys and concerns, pulpit mic, and capability for special assistive devices for the hearing impaired.

Rearrange the worship area so as to be friendlier to visitors and guest speakers, and more conducive to worship. This includes removing clutter, creating a new seating arrangement, and beautifying the space. It may include creating a new entryway.

Have signage for restrooms in worship area, and in the Order of Service.

Send worship associates/facilitators to worship training (check with District).

Create a plan for follow-up with visitors.

Make sure every act during worship is understandable to visitors: ie. when to sit and stand, be sure to introduce yourselves during joys and concerns, use first and last names, don't assume anything!

Continue to have quality lay and professionally led worship services, the choir, and children's RE.

Caring Committee/Pastoral Care:

Create a brochure explaining what pastoral care services are available to the congregation, and how to access them. Consider making pulpit announcements about this during worship. Mail the brochure to all on the current mailing list, and give to visitors.

Send the Caring Committee to lay pastoral care training (check with District).

Professional ministry:

Spend some time considering what you would want a part-time professional minister to do should you decide the time is right to look for one.

Membership:

Purge current membership list of inactive people. Check in with them, perhaps with a phone call, as to their intentions and desires. Follow up with previously active people. Create a system of membership that works for you, ie. active and inactive categories. Find out why people have chosen to no longer be a part of HUU.

Mission:

It seemed from our conversation that the unspoken Mission of HUU is to be a voice in the larger community on issues of local, state, national, and international importance.

Confirm this Mission – make it “real.”

Create a process by which the congregation, as one body, can take a stand on issues. Look into formal consensus or the democratic process. Check with other congregations as to their process. Be sure to check with the District and with the Live Oak UU Church in Cedar Park, TX.

Designate someone as congregational spokesperson/liaison for the media and the Harrisonburg interfaith group. See that they get training (check with the UUA PR Department, the UUA Washington Office, and the District).

Consider new signage to reflect this mission. Look to your evangelical brethren in the area and get a large, well-lit sign where you can post meaningful messages. The current sign is hard to see, and to read. You can also get a traditional “Wayside Pulpit” sign as well.

Maintenance:

Look at your Organizational Structure – is it working for you? Do committee members have term limits, or an opportunity to get on or off a committee every year? Are new people being trained? Are people gifts and talents being used appropriately in

their work for the congregation? Do committees meet too often? Consider having “committee night” when all the committees meet after a potluck, once a month, every other month, or quarterly. This builds community and makes it more fun. Have opening words, a chalice lighting, and a check-in at every meeting. Remember that the organization is there to serve the needs of the religious community.

Make sure your staff (DRE, administrator) has job descriptions and an evaluation process.

Look at communications. Is there a better way to keep everyone up-to-date with the actions and activities of the leadership and the congregation? Consider job descriptions for each committee and board member so that people are clear as to what they are supposed to be doing. Do people know who they should contact for different issues?

Confirm the “Point Person for Congregational Concerns” and let everyone know who she is and how to reach her.

Look at your building entryway issues and consider if you should add another one, where, and how.

And above all, remember:

Keep it Simple! Quality Sunday morning, commitment to your Mission, and keeping up with the Maintenance – that’s all a small congregation needs to do.

Have Fun! Laugh, tell jokes, play with the kids, have parties. Personal and congregation spiritual growth is not all serious all the time.

Thank People! Lay-led small congregations are hard to run. There is no paid staff to be in charge. Give yourself, and each other, credit for the wonderful things you do now and the wonderful things you have yet to do. You are important to the greater Harrisburg community – and to each other. Don’t lose sight of that.

And thanks for inviting me to spend the day with you.

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