

HUU Congregational Retreat Notes¹ November 4-5, 2005

Facilitated by Robert E. Smith

Approximately 28 members and friends attended over the course of two days.

Friday, November 4

6-9:30

We began with a pizza dinner, then a chalice lighting, reading, and song. Afterwards, Robert E. led us in a number of icebreaking and teambuilding games. These are the “Lessons Learned” from the games:

- It makes the task easier to complete when we have **clear goals**
- It helps to **know what is expected of me**
- We often were able to **get help from others**, though sometimes that help was unsolicited.
- We worked together best when the focus was **cooperation, not competition**.
- It is easiest to complete a task when you are in a **non-judgmental** environment.
- There are **many ways to do most things**.
- Some of us **learned by watching others**, which made completing the tasks easier.
- We all **worked together** to complete the tasks.
- We discovered that sometimes **“rules” may be self-imposed**. We bring our own expectations of rules to a task, and sometimes make the task more difficult than it needs to be.
- It was frustrating for some to hear a number of **“it won’t work here”** comments. Sometimes, though, **“We’ve tried it before”** statements can be helpful.
- The process is always more **fun if it’s okay to make mistakes**.

Saturday, November 5

8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

We began the morning with a continental breakfast and then gathered for an opening reading. We then were introduced to the **“Covenant of Beloved Community.”**

Robert E. read a good part of the document to us. There were a number of observations in response to the document:

- CBC is **both a concept and a process**.
- The CBC document is **not widely known**; it was presented to the board in 2004 and has been in a trial stage within the board. This is the first time many church members have learned about it or heard what it actually says.
- A few people mentioned that the document is **not concrete or specific enough** to easily apply.
- Others commented that it is **hard to know when to start the process**.
- One of the authors explained that CBC was **presented to the board as a “Spiritual Practice.”**

¹ Typed by Julie Caran on 11/19/05. Phrases in bold are taken directly from the white pad notes at the retreat.

- Some said that we **need to focus on the “beloved” part** of the document, **not just the conflict** management aspect.
- The **human dilemma** is that we will always face conflicts.
- There was a suggestion that we **embrace one another’s conflicts**.
- We need to **clarify what methods can be used for getting services** related to the CBC.

After a break, we shared some ideas for implementing the CBC.

- It needs to be **distributed** via the **website** and **hard copies at church**
- We might be able to present it in a series of **Sunday Services**, with **one Sunday for each section** of the document. Some stated that the best way to make it a service would be to focus on the idea of Beloved Community as Spiritual Practice.
- It could be introduced in **small group discussions**, such as in House Churches and Campus Ministry.
- It might help to have a **committee** to establish the integration **process**. There needs to be a **place for conversations** about CBC **to occur**.
- The steps suggested for integration of the CBC into the congregation might be summarized as:
 - **Distribution**
 - **Discussion**
 - **Offer chance to commit**
 - **Revisit**
 - **Set a timeline**

We had a lunch break. Then, at the request of some retreat attendees, we spent time focusing on **HUU strengths**.

- **Lay led**
- **Mortgage virtually paid off**
- **Services year-round**
- **Active RE program**
- **50% of members on committees**
- **strong social justice** work
- **good lay-led services**
- **best website**
- **getting new members**
- **RE program with film**
- **Effective newsletter**
- **Weekly emails**
- **Incluvis(e)ity**
- **Acceptance, compassion, openness, understanding of others’ paths**
- **HUU is thriving part of this community**
 - **Providing a witness to our values**
- **Wealth of abilities, talent, desire, in the members**

- **A safe community**
- **Great potential to find other seekers and make them members**
- **Learning from our experiences (young and still learning) and from others**
 - **Small congregation network**

Next, we focused on our goals from last year's retreat and our **2004-05 Goals**

1) Membership

- **Revive membership committee** ✓
- **Empower members** -There was some discussion about what this meant. The consensus seemed to be that we want all members to feel responsibility for members and visitors.
- **Outreach-brochures for visitors and new members** ✓ (need to make more)
- **Do New UU Program** ✓ (expanded to 2 classes)
- **Getting to Know You Better** ✓ (circle dinners, dinners for new members)
- **UU History and Values** ✓ (series of services; information at New UU classes)
- **Have active Greeter program** ✓
- **Follow-up letter** ✓
- **Have info packet** for New UU class
 - **History**
 - **Welcome**
- **New Strategies**
 - **Fall ad**
 - **“Valley” packet**
 - **state membership responsibilities more clearly**

2) Long Range Planning

- **Committee** ✓
- **Building** – “research options” (This is still a goal)
- **Staffing** (The long range planning committee (LRPC) has considered this. The board is now looking at the LRPC recommendations.)
- **Pledges** (Consider what we need to receive in pledges in order to accomplish goals.)

Report from LRPC members

Ministry Issues – We can't afford a full time minister or offer a competitive salary for a part time minister right now. Some other options for the moment might be:

Ministry **Team** – 4 church members fulfilling the roles that a minister usually has

Question: Do we need to have some sort of **Caring Team** in addition to the

Ministry team, or would the duties fall under the ministry team?

Staffing - 100-125 members = full-time minister

3) Lifespan Faith Development

- **More RE** ✓
 - **Children** ✓ (ongoing)
 - **Increase participation of children and youth (teens)**

- **2005-06 Parents Volunteer**
 - **RE fee?**
 - **Adults** ✓ (ongoing)
 - **Field trips (GA, SUUSI, other churches)**
- **Diverse RE Groups**
 - **Christian, Buddhist, Humanist, Pagan** (ongoing)
- **Expand Adult Education**
 - **Open to anyone interested**
 - **“right relations”**
 - **spiritual practices**
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Finally, we examined the internal strengths and external opportunities that might allow us to reach our goals, and the internal weaknesses and external threats that might allow or prevent us from reaching our goals.

INTERNAL

Strengths

- **Membership growth**
- **Pledging growth**
- **Greater RE numbers**
- **Strong music programs**
- **Own building/have room to grow**

Weaknesses

- **Small in number**
- **Some members never been asked to be on a committee**

EXTERNAL

Opportunities

- **Growing Harrisonburg community**
- **Trend toward being part of larger community**
- **One of few liberal churches in area**
- **Progressives linking together; build partnerships**

Threats

- **Area is conservative**

Robert made some suggestions that we might want to consider:

- Have a **Board Development Committee** to look for and prepare potential new board members.
- Have **Nominating Committee** function all year, not just at times of need.
- Create a **Board Member Manual** to include
 - **Bylaws**
 - **Job description/roles**
 - **History**

- Have some sort of **Board Member Training**
- **Get copies of Churchworks by Anne Odin Heller**
- Have an **annual R&R Banquet for Committees**

In 2006, we will also work to:

- **Implement the Covenant of Beloved Community**
- **Have info packet for New UU class**
- **State membership responsibilities more clearly**
- **Develop “job descriptions” for committees and board**
- **research Building options**
- **Review Long Range Planning Committee document and look at Staffing and Pledging goals**
- **Increase participation of children and youth**
- **Get more parents to volunteer in RE**