

RVUUF Congregational Discussions

2018 – 2019

Report

Introduction

Recently the Board, CFM and Minister met and proposed holding 3 congregational conversations. It was strongly felt that input from the congregation will guide the leadership team in setting priorities. RVUUF's first **Congregational Discussion** session took place November 4, 2018. Five groups held brainstorming style conversations in and around the Great Hall and Emerson House. This session was the first of three scheduled discussions to kick off the exploration of future congregational directions. In 2019 there will be a second topic regarding the future of the Religious Education program. The third will be determined.

Rev. Sean introduced CFM and Board member teams, then assigned each team to a location around the building. One member each from CFM/Board (teams of 2) facilitated and scribed for the groups. Follow-up sessions were offered to folks who were unable to attend or wanted to provide more input.

Each group utilized a standard format. This included **Welcome and Introductions** followed by sharing background on why we are holding these aspiring discussions:

Our congregation is in the last year of our 5 year developmental goal cycle. It is time to begin envisioning and setting priorities for the coming years.

In working to build a leadership team, the Board, CFM and Minister hope to have a dynamic where roles, responsibilities, authority and accountability are clear in governance and ministry. We will keep you posted about our research on models of church leadership.

Each group was given ground rules to guide interactions. It was noted that everyone was invited to these conversations, in groups of 10-12 people. Everyone had a chance to talk, one person at a time. This was not meant to be a debate. Rather it was an opportunity to just listen so as to hear each other's input.

The facilitators prepared each group with a statement about how to conduct the discussion:

- Everyone's ideas, contributions, and dreams are important, no one's are more important than another's. One of the taproots of our UU values: every person is equally important and welcome.
- How we treat one another is as important as what we accomplish. We can talk about "inherent worth and dignity" and "equity, justice and compassion," but must strive to live into them.
- Covenant and compassion must be our guides.

Three questions were posed to the group and everyone was invited to reflect and share in the conversation.

- **Who do we want to be?** (Give few minutes to think. If get stuck you might offer some ideas like a beacon of social justice or the most welcoming congregation in the valley)
- **Whom do we serve?** (Give time before prompting with suggestions like "Who isn't at the table")

- **What choices do we have?** (Might interject that we have no choice about growing because we are an inclusive religion but we do have choices about how. “How might we design growth for the maximum benefit of all?”)

Group Minutes

Three tables on pages 3 – 8 show the synopsis of responses provided by each group. As much as possible duplicates within each group were deleted unless it was not possible to do this because it would not reflect the spirit of the input. Duplicates among groups were not removed so as to show commonalities. Repetitions within groups are noted with a star (★). Some descriptions of each group follow:

Group 1: Facilitator and scribe: Diane Werich and Nadine Parker; Nov. 4, 10 people and Nov. 18, 8 people.

Group 2: Facilitator and scribe: John Limb and Mary Rexford; Nov. 4, 9 people and Nov. 15, 6 people.

Group 3: Facilitator and scribe: Roger Howe and Rosalie Caffrey; Nov. 4, 13 people.

Group 4: Facilitator and scribe: Phil Westergaard and Manny De Aquino; Nov. 4, 8 people.

Group 5: Facilitator and scribe: Suzanne Anderson and Susan Lio; Nov. 4, 10 people.

Evaluation:

It was intended that all participants would have an opportunity to provide feedback and evaluate the process. This turned out to be loosely done but following are some reflections on process and feedback.

Everyone had a chance to speak. Everyone participated, and was listened to.

A couple people went on too long, Mary reminded them we've gone far afield, must move forward, which we did. There were a few differing points of view during the process, and these were held with respect. People seemed to enjoy hearing from each other, and it was a good opportunity for newer folks to become more acquainted with others.

Though it was explained at the start, one person remained confused by the process - what is the goal, where this will go from here. Another said we can't see the outcome yet. Several liked the sharing, getting to know folks. One person would like this brought up in front of us often, saying "There will be difficult decisions to make."

Question: Who do we want to be?				
<p>Group 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Know history, historical context of our faith ★ know history in justice; inspire us ★ know strengths, celebrate who we are, feel alive • beacon for education, esp. controversial issues • safe; security plan • do justice work, the fabric of our congregation -- adopt Syrian family • space for various activities • PR, bulletin boards let guests know what is up • Welcoming; follow up with guests • Live principles, put goals into action; healthy, good leadership • more ways to care and support each other, caring phone tree, caring committee ★ welcomes all; focus on spiritual growth (Soul Matters, Cat Cox) 	<p>Group 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ friendly to strangers, greet and talk to them ★ all feel welcome, people with handicaps, canes, disabilities, in wheel chairs • diverse • inspires hope, nourishes our spirit • relevant to our lives ★ draws people because of our social justice commitment and work • vibrant in the community • reach out to younger members, anticipate next generation of leaders ★ challenge keeping older generation active & encourage younger generation • Pull in more retired people, here for a long time • discuss service, what does it mean to us; some other time in the week • Sunday evening service, sometime during the week • Appreciate, maintain, sustain rvuuf community • make opportunities to meet others, discussion groups • On-line service reach broader community 	<p>Group 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ choir and music program; lots of talent • Children taking more leadership in the service. More diversity in children; races and ages • Introduce UU to the community • leadership bringing ideas regarding homelessness • stronger leadership role in So. Oregon churches ★ More interaction with Ashland churches ★ Sharing and outreach with other churches to aid the community • Share choirs and other skills. Sean meet with congregational leaders • more UU churches in Jackson county • Lack of a program for teenagers ★ diversity in membership including political • African Americans – want their history acknowledged to legitimize them • Acknowledge white supremacy • financial stability • Embrace the fullness of our tradition – the sacredness, mystery, spirit; in our vocabulary • basic mission: minister to our congregants • communicate with each other: what we are doing, goings on in our community ★ more input from younger people; their concerns i.e. climate change 	<p>Group 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grow in racial diversity • Attract young families • Services need to be more diverse – better now • full congregation needs to provide welcoming atmosphere, also assign members like usual Sunday roles • Forums for Rev. Sean to become known in the Rogue Valley • so many activities makes it difficult to find time to attend RVUUF 	<p>Group 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ welcoming • working on human rights • inclusive of blacks, Hispanics, homeless, LGBTQ, disabilities (have a signer), Native Americans, Muslim • not all white seniors • accessible (assist devices, restrooms that work for all, easy website to read or hear (OSU example)) • draw the community with information on what we do, getting involved, publish announcements ★ spiritual development • talk about and prepare for death • joyful

Question: Whom do we serve?				
<p>Group 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • old white people • everybody • beacon of hope in Rogue Valley ★ outreach to create diversity, not exclusive; use tech • more age diversity now • SOU, OSF outreach • support Rev Theresa's outreach • examine why people of color do not come back, train welcome team ★ serve all within and without; link to other congregations • communicate well about UU • our congregation needs to be the priority 	<p>Group 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ expand population we serve: forums and talks to let people know who we are/what matters to us, workshops of interest to groups, like parents ★ serve our members and friends, when they need help; ways to get to know one another, ways to contribute in the community • draw more people from the valley; Latino population. A service that reaches out to them? forum where our communities come together on a topic? • outreach to Muslim community; potluck and exchange about our faiths; 3 yrs ago • serve socio-economically diverse people; homeless, people who aren't well educated, have trouble relating to our services? • college students and faculty, beyond Sept SOU event • opportunities for people to learn about us? What do we do with our principles, what are our responses to them? • stand up for our beliefs • allow diversity of thought • services with heart, some want intellectual services; suggests 2, one head, one heart • If we serve each other, take care of each other, then serve community, world & planet • assisting homeless has been rich experience; education on how this stretches us, how to work with judgments • learning about privilege to help us reach out to others; understanding of different people 	<p>Group 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT – a safe place. Revisit Welcoming Congregation process • Spiritual not religious demographic • People of color. White privilege exits, limited population to draw on in this community. • Hispanic – invisible but are here. Encourage families to come • 3rd Sunday offerings – we serve many organizations • serve our own UUs; keep track of them, look after them • Homeless and their families 	<p>Group 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serve our membership needs; if our members are not fulfilled then may leave • Social Justice, homeless problems, local issues • serve greater community; 25 miles • Tell membership what we are doing; not always aware of our activities • Make more families welcome – focus on families with children • Greater outreach to the Medford UU group – creating a larger diverse congregation • joint action with religious congregation in the area, with a similar outreach 	<p>Group 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feed the hungry and homeless • grandparents for young families (caring to young families as well as the old/sick)

Question: What are our choices?				
<p>Group 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change our services to attract diverse people • Ask people of color what might bring them back ★ Follow up with visitors • reach out to Latino workers, Jews, Muslims, LGBTQ • study other church's services who attract more diversity • how to expand and why • two different services • other location or satellite ★ make social justice more coherent and connected to our congregation • committed to social justice, spiritual growth, children 	<p>Group 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realize we're not going to attract certain groups here, they come don't see anyone who looks like them, or don't like what we have to offer • focus on people in this valley who will be drawn to us if they hear our message ★ grow RE program, which has been happening; families come and don't stay • offer more support to parents • remember, value older members and friends • buy a bus and travel around the valley • start satellite UU groups • a more central location ★ vigorous discussion about a social hall or extension; host greater variety of activities • cost and money is a concern; need to be careful • opportunities for people to let us know if not meeting needs ★ Are we maxed out? • offer a course at OLLI? about UUism, or explore liberal religion in Rogue Valley. How are we alike/different? 	<p>Group 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advertising – make community aware of us. (Are you a UU and don't know it? slogan.) • children invite their friends and go to other faith communities • Conduct community sex education classes • Target SOU – both faculty and students. programs focused on students; transient group but may plant seeds to become UU • consider economic analysis of decisions – know the impact • Have a UU Night –with wine and cheese 	<p>Group 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Reach out to families • Larger congregation can work with activities; groups, Soul Matters, etc. ★ outreach with ads and contacts ★ ways to participate in RVUUF besides Sunday service • Need reason for people to participate • Do not permit cliques • Empower members to get involved in social justice programs • Some are involved in RVUUF activities, but do not attend Sundays • Growth means change; understand this and accept it if that is the direction decided ★ Ask members to invite former members; they can discover how RVUUF has changed and is working to meet the needs of the greater Community • Conduct an Open House – invite all outsiders • Outreach to SOU students (Rev. Sean and Rev. Theresa's message) • Activity sheets placed in seat backs (for those attending other functions) • Previews at Varsity Theatre 	<p>Group 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sermons on line, inspirational • explore beliefs, ideas, understanding others • be a green sanctuary (energy efficient) • social and spiritual center (social hall could be in another location) • respectful of our history • a home for those not here yet, evangelize and bring in those in need • life-long learning • published curriculum for RE ★ youth groups • plugged into regional, district, and national UU organizations • place for young homeschool families ★ lots of events for young families (like the Xmas fair) • outreach to university students for church and other social events • place of cultural diversity in music, aesthetics, activities (less “protestant”), explore other ideas ★ upbeat, joyful music • sponsor refugees, transgendered (perhaps in conjunction with UUSC) ★ partner with other churches, international social justice projects (good motivator for the young) ★ involve talented people from our community (OSF, OSU, etc.) • get good parking (options at businesses nearby) • coordinator collects what committees are doing and publish regularly • better annual report, include all committees • Bring back: Great Decisions group, Guest at the Table