

Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua, NH

President's Annual Report to the Congregation

June 6, 2013

The following is a summary of the Board's activities during the 2012-13 Church Year.

Transition

The Board of Trustees has had extra responsibility beyond our usual duties during this first ministry transition year. The Board has helped to guide the congregation along the path of recognizing who we are, what we want to be, and what kind of settled minister will most helpful to us. First, in June, we appointed the Transition Team, a 5-member committee to help orient, be a sounding board for, and to assist our interim minister during her time with us. Then, during the weekend of October 5 and 6, we worked with the Transition Team to host the Start-Up Workshop, led by Joe Sullivan, our Northern New England District Executive. Anyone who attended (and lots of us did!) will remember the stunning image of people lined up around the edge of the sanctuary in order of the number of years of membership. Each cohort of members contributed memories and ideas about our church practices and norms. The next day a smaller group discussed our church's strengths, resources, and expectations of our members, staff, and minister. In January the Board and the Transition Team continued these types of conversations when we hosted a series of small group discussions focused on Church History. The Search Committee is presently holding additional small group discussions, called Cottage Meetings, for even more refinement of our congregational identity and aspirations.

In December the Board met with Rev. Olav Nieuwejaar, the NNED Settlement Representative, to consider our method for choosing a Search Committee. Rev. Nieuwejaar recommended a 7-person committee. Although he acknowledged that it was a lot of work, he also recommended that the Board follow the Keyes Method, in which the Board would attempt to contact all voting members of the church to ask each one for recommendations of fellow church members that he or she would trust to search for a new minister. Under the Keyes Method, the numbers of "nominations" each member receives are tallied. The top 4 nominees are automatically included on the Search Committee, if they agree to serve. Among the other nominees with significant congregational support, the Board chooses 3 others to add to the committee who would contribute needed skills and/or demographic diversity. The Board chose to follow the Keyes Method, making the phone calls in February, and thereby presenting an excellent slate to a Special Meeting of the Congregation on March 17. And, yes, it was a lot of work, but truly worthwhile—at the Special Meeting the Search Committee was elected unanimously.

Another transition task that the Board worked on in February and March was a formal Interim Ministry Assessment. Both the Board and Rev. Olivia, working separately, considered a series of questions, provided by the UUA, about the church's progress in completing the recommended steps for a successful transition. After we had each written our answers, the Board and Rev. Olivia met together to compare our answers. We agreed on almost everything. The assessment showed that both the Board and Rev. Olivia felt that our transition was progressing well. The Board subsequently offered to renew Rev. Olivia's contract for a second year, and she accepted.

Priorities

In January 2012 the Board adopted 3 priorities for the next 18 months. They were titled, 1) All-Church Social Justice Project, 2) Retain Youth and Attract Young Adults, and 3) The Improved Communication

Project. The time frame for these priorities is just ending. The Board had adopted these priorities based on input from the congregation that we collected in the fall of 2011 when we knew that Rev. Edington was going to be retiring the following summer. It was the Board's intention that, even though we were facing a ministerial transition and all the extra work that it would require, the church was not going to stop work on its mission. Rev. Holmes was aware of these priorities when she was hired by the Board, and she began work with the Board to clarify what the role of the minister, as our Chief Executive Officer, should be regarding these priorities early in the fall of 2012.

Discussions about the role of the minister and the role of the Board soon made us all (Board members and Rev. Olivia) realize that we could stand to improve our implementation of and, in fact, our understanding of Policy Governance. We have contracted with Unity Consulting for 10 hours of consulting to help with this. We have begun this work and will be continuing next year in an effort to be prepared to operate much more smoothly under Policy Governance with our new settled minister. Our priorities, as well as being important efforts in their own right, provided excellent test cases in helping us learn our respective roles.

Since we have come to the end of our 18-month time frame, sub-committees of the Board have recently written reports evaluating our progress on the 3 priorities (these reports are included as an appendix to this report), and we have been working on updates to the priorities to carry the church forward for the next two years. At the Annual Meeting we will invite you to consider the updated priorities we have developed, and we will be asking for your vote to endorse them.

Stewardship

The Board worked closely with the Stewardship Committee this year. In particular, the Board decided, on the recommendation of Rev. Olivia, to approve a complete budget proposal, before the Stewardship campaign was launched, to demonstrate to the congregation what each member was being asked to pledge toward. This is the first time we remember doing an aspirational budget first, and then asking the congregation to pledge toward it. There were 3 particular features of the proposed budget: we knew there would be extra expenses associated with our ministerial search; we wanted to add funds for further leadership development (for the development of leadership throughout the church community, not just for Board members), and we hoped to be able to give our staff a cost of living adjustment since we did not do so last year (this did not include the interim minister since she works for us under a contract).

The results of the Stewardship Campaign are a glass-half-full/glass-half-empty situation. As background, last year's (2011-2012) stewardship total had been significantly less than we had received in the previous 3 or 4 years. This year's campaign total is up about \$20,000, as I write this, over last year's total (an approximately 10% increase), but we fell well short of our goal. About 40% of the people who pledged actually increased their pledges over last year (and we very much thank everyone who pledged for their commitment), but we received fewer pledges. The budget that will be presented at the Annual Meeting will have to take these realities into account especially since last year's budget was a deficit budget which relied on cash reserves to balance.

Membership

In the course of compiling phone lists for our Search Committee calls in February, it came to the Board's attention that, while our voting membership stood at about 314 people, the number of people who had contributed to the operating budget of the church was only about 263. In investigating this disparity, we discovered that, under the current Bylaws, a "contribution of record" made to the church for an

Outreach Collection was sufficient, along with signing the membership book, for an individual to be a voting member. All funds collected for Outreach are given to the designated recipients (this is appropriate), but whether from misunderstanding or intention on their part, we were carrying about 50 voting members on our rolls who were not contributing to the church itself. Quite frankly, this was a shock. At the Annual Meeting the Board will be introducing an amendment to the Bylaws to address this.

With the voting member numbers under scrutiny and this year's Stewardship Campaign yielding fewer pledges, we analyzed the number of people who were represented by the pledges that have been received in this year's campaign—it is only about 200. This begs the question, "How big a church are we really?" The answer is important—it relates to who we want to hire as a new minister, what set of potential ministers will be interested in applying for our pulpit, and, finally, how much of a budget we can expect to support.

Going Forward

The full range of questions about how large a church we are have only recently come to light, but I pledge that the Board will work diligently to understand what is going on and why--and to keep the congregation informed of our work. This is exactly the kind of discovery that a time of interim ministry is supposed to allow us to uncover and address. Although few of us would welcome these questions, it is good to know what is true in order to decide where we go from here. I continue to have faith that we are a vital faith community that is making a difference in the lives of our members and friends, as well as the larger community.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen Fisher

Appendix: Assessment Reports of 3 18-month Priorities, prepared by Board of Trustees Sub-Committees, for discussion at April and May Board meetings

Note: The content of the following reports does not necessarily reflect final Board decisions or recommendations.

DRAFT 2013 – 2015 Communication Priorities

Communication within the church community is a two-way street. Church groups should be responsible for widely communicating information about their activities, both in reporting what they have done and inviting others to participate in future events. Church members and friends, for their part, should be responsible for keeping up with communications coming their way.

- Over the course of the next year, the BoT will work with the congregation to develop and adopt a Covenant of Right Relations. The purpose of this covenant will be to guide us as we strive to relate to each other and all of our stakeholders and constituents in a conscious, ethical manner.

- Develop a Policy and Procedure manual to clarify how the congregation will implement its communication goals. The manual may include some of the following:

Current Successes

- UU Nashua's website <http://www.uunashua.org>
(When asked how they find us, some visitors credit referrals from friends, some say they saw our sign, but our biggest source of visitors is the website.)
- UU Nashua's Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/groups/UUChurch.Nashua/>
- E-mail
 - UU Nashua announcement e-mail list
 - UU Nashua's "UU Cares" e-mail list
- Occasional "snail" mailings – they get people's attention
- Ads in the *Hippo Press*, *Nashua Telegraph* and *Hudson-Litchfield News* - they have brought in more visitors.
- Bulletin Board in the dining room where we post the BoT's monthly minutes.
- Members of the BoT welcoming people from the pulpit at the beginning of every Sunday service.
- "Opportunity Table" in the dining room that gives news of events, projects and opportunities for members and friends.
- Nominating Committee led the committees in publicizing roles.
- Advance notice provided for congregational meetings.
- Continue our successful communications with our larger greater Nashua community.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Continue to encourage committees to contribute articles to the newsletter and submit events for the weekly Announcements page. Membership coordinator to contact each committee chair at least twice a year with a reminder.
- Make an effort to get accurate e-mail address from church members and friends who want to receive information via email. Place a yearly reminder in the newsletter and in a prominent place on the Opportunity Table that states one must “sign up” to be placed on one of the e-mails lists.
- Although it is very difficult to obtain articles in the local press, continue efforts to “pitch” story ideas to *The Telegraph* and other media. Make sure church services and events are listed accurately in *The Telegraph’s* Religion section every Saturday.

Additional Possibilities

- Make better use of the sign out front. Consider using the “Wayside Pulpit” messages (they are free <http://www.uua.org/worship/wayside/27210.shtml>).
- Review what is included in our Welcome Packet. Consider replacing individual flyers for selected groups with a one-page listing of all committee/social “opportunities.” Include contact names and phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses.
- In addition to posting BoT minutes in the dining room and submitting articles to the newsletter on a monthly basis, the BoT might consider ways to work with the Executive team to provide updates to committee chairs about decisions made in BoT meetings, as appropriate.
- Consider permitting the BoT member who is welcoming the congregation each Sunday to make a maximum of two pre-approved announcements from the pulpit.
- Keep the Opportunity Table as part of our “mix” of communications methods, but consider its placement and corresponding effectiveness.

SOURCES

March 15, 2013. Interview of President, UU Nashua, Ellen Fisher, by Mary Licking.

March 14 and March 17, 2013. Interview of UU Nashua Membership Coordinator, Sherri Woolsey, by Mary Licking.

March 19-20, 2013. Interview of UU Nashua Membership Coordinator, Sherri Woolsey, by Pat Ladew.

March 20, 2013. E-mail from Mike Ballentine to Pat Ladew.

March 29, 2013. E-mail from Bill Kennedy to Pat Ladew. (On a scale of 1-10, Bill estimates the PR committee is at a 7, while the church as a whole is at a 6.)

September through March 2013. Eyewitness accounts of UU Nashua communications efforts. Pat Ladew, Mary Licking.

DRAFT PRIORITY 2013 – 2015
Retain Youth & Attract Young Adults
May 2013 – Kathleen Griffis & Dave Hudson

Introduction

Kathleen and I found the task of rewriting the board’s youth-related priorities to be a challenge. We have reached out to various stakeholders for their input, but the task is non-trivial and easy solutions elusive. Indeed, Rev. Holmes noted in a reply that, “the Board needs to have a thoughtful conversation with the stakeholders who may be expected or asked to help fulfill the priority.”

Further, with the benefit of hindsight, we wonder if the board’s previous goals were too prescriptive (solve the problem THIS way) and too “top-down” (here is OUR recommended way).

In short, we have no doubt that more attention needs to be focused on this area, but think the process of goal setting, vis-à-vis specifics, may need to be reworked. To that end, we propose the following format and approach.

Overview

OBSERVATION: The board has noticed that we do not see a great many young adults at Sunday services or at other church events, nor are they likely to see us at one of their gatherings. We also believe our church would be an attractive spiritual home for young families, yet we do not see as many joining the congregation as we might hope. We acknowledge that engaging 18-35 year-olds will be challenging, but we believe more could be done to attract and retain youth and young adults.

GOAL: We would like our young people to feel welcomed into our church community. We would like the young people that grow up in our church to share an enduring sense of acceptance and belonging to this place wherever the wind may take them. We would also like to create an attractive and enticing atmosphere for youthful newcomers and young families, drawing them in and smoothly integrating them into our church family.

SUCCESS: We would like to be more engaged in the lives of our young people and have them be more actively engaged in the life of the church, from attending events to taking an active role in church governance. We would like to see more young people and young families join the church.

Implementation

OWNERSHIP: This priority will require the resources and energy of several church committees, including the RE Committee and the Membership Committee. Given the necessarily broad nature of this priority, we believe the Executive Team should be charged with implementing this priority.

TIMELINE: We recommend focusing on this priority over the next 24 months and using the following implementation timeline.

6 months – The Executive Team (or its designated assignee) will provide the board with objectives and evaluation criteria.

12 months – The Executive Team (or its designated assignee) will provide the board with an interim update and self-assessment.

21 months – The Executive Team (or its designated assignee) will meet with board representatives in preparation for a joint review and final evaluation.

RESOURCE USAGE: We do not believe work on this priority will have a significant budgetary impact. While we don't think any additional resources need to be allocated at this point, we understand this may change as the stakeholders dig in.

SOME IDEAS: The following list of ideas was discussed during the development of this priority. The board shares these thoughts in the hopes that they might serve as a starting point for additional brainstorming. These ideas should not be viewed as requirements, merely possibilities.

- What if we formed a “student council” type of system run largely by young adults that helped organize their own events?
- Interested high school students reaching the age of eighteen (18) will continue to be formally welcomed into the church as members, with a youth-focused (?) ceremony and celebration.
- Encourage active young adult participation and inclusion in social justice projects and on all committees.
- Find ways to integrate young people into the church, and non-parents into youth experiences.
- Ask every church committee to consider ways this priority may impact them and ways they might contribute to its success.
- There is some anecdotal evidence that young people consider joining a religious community after having children. We wonder if more could be done to reach out and target this group.

- It has been observed that Sunday service is designed for adults. Does engagement of young people require us to design an entirely different type of service held on Sunday at 9 PM via Twitter or Skype or something else so cool we don't even know about it?
- The 2014 GA will be held in Providence, RI. Could we send a youth delegation?
- Admitting that many young people go away to college at 18, is there a way we can stay at least somewhat engaged with them while they are away.
- What existing things are working so well that we might consider capitalizing on them?
- Are there ways to give teenagers a more active role in services, perhaps inviting them to light the chalice, present a children's time, or some serve some other "leadership" role? Could the auction committee, for example, find a young person to be an auctioneer for some portion of the evening?
- Are the communication "needs" of young people different than those of older adults?
- How often are young people, young adults, young families, older families, and seniors all in the same room?
- What might we learn from the ways other organizations involve and attract young people?

Other thoughts

Our challenge is not unique. Young people often drift away from institutions at all levels when they graduate from high school or college, returning only when they begin families of their own. For our existing under-18 members, we must ask how we (a) prevent that separation, (b) reduce the distance drifted (by keeping in touch, for example), or (c) reduce the duration of the separation. For young people who had no relationship with us prior to 18, we must ask how we (a) create an atmosphere that would entice them to engage with us, (b) provide 'services' they need and (c) let them know we're here.

We are reminded that many social organizations are facing declining enrollment and support across all ages and backgrounds as larger societal forces tug at us all. We move more often, change jobs more often, settle further from home, travel more, and have more involved children. In addition, there are more things vying for our attention than ever before and our young adults must surely feel these pressures too.

In terms of focusing on young adults, we really have two groups: those that still live at home (youth under-18) and those that don't (young adults 18-35). Two of the sub-priorities clearly focus on the 18+ segment, this is precisely the group we have the hardest time reaching. At 18 or 19, many of our young people are away at college, tied up with their first job, or out exploring the larger world. It's possible that our best success may come by focusing on our under-18 demographic in the hopes of building stronger ties that last longer or lead them back sooner.

We wonder if we've asked the right questions and focused on the right things. Have we prepared our young adults (functionally, culturally, etc.) to serve on committees by providing them leadership positions at an earlier age? To Olivia's point, have we engaged them and integrated them into our church life in such a way that extending their connection with us beyond age 18 feels natural? Do we want them here because of what they represent or would we miss them because we are somehow diminished without them?

In terms of reaching young people who have left home, there are lots of different segments. The difference between a 35-year old and a 39-year old may be negligible, but the difference between an 18-year old and a 22-year old or 26-year old can be huge. What's of interest to a 22-year old, may not be what draws in someone younger or older.

Review of Priority "All-Church Social Justice Project"
Respectfully submitted by Mike Wilt & Jenn Morton

Original text of Priority adopted by BoT, 1/31/2012

All-Church Social Justice Project Involve all church members and friends, including children, in the "Ending Hunger and Homelessness Project," as formulated by the Social Justice Committee. This project has 4 parts: education, advocacy, service, and financial support.

1. Within the next 18 months we will make at least 4 major efforts (events, publications, or the like) which will serve to educate our church members and friends, as well as the wider community, about this project and the underlying issues. This education will include information about how individuals can become involved in solving the problems that contribute to hunger and homelessness.
2. Within the next 18 months we will find a way to track the number of volunteers associated with our church working in the associated organizations and the hours spent volunteering, and will double both numbers.
3. Within the next 18 months we will donate, as a church, at least \$10,000 to the associated organizations.

Follow-Up/Review:

Significant progress toward this priority has been achieved. However, the #2 listed piece was met with difficulties that seem too overwhelming to overcome.

1. Within the next 18 months we will make at least 4 major efforts (events, publications, or the like) which will serve to educate our church members and friends, as well as the wider community, about this project and the underlying issues. This education will include information about how individuals can become involved in solving the problems that contribute to hunger and homelessness.

Efforts supporting this part of the priority include, but are not limited to:

- Sunday Service - Dedicated a March 2011 service to the EHH Project

- Web Page and Informational Materials – Created a web page (off UU Nashua) for EHH Project and informational materials for newsletter and other communication opportunities.
- Singer-Songwriter Event – Organized a Singer-Songwriter event and donated the proceeds to the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter.
- “Bingo” Activity – Set up a Bingo activity in church with a card containing EHH activities that promoted a lot of discussion.
- Many Collections – Collected hats, coats, and other items for the Community Supper guests; collected holiday gifts and checks for Meals on Wheels, Nashua Children’s Home, and Nashua Soup Kitchen; collected sweaters for Davis Funeral Home project; had additional collections organized by Simple Gifts Coffeehouse, White Wing, UU Meditation Group, and book club for area organizations.
- Community Neighbors Book Sale (Hannaford- Nashua, NH) – Jamie Ryfsnieder arranged for Hannaford to donate the proceeds from one week of their used books sales to the EHH Project.
- Advocacy – Members of the EHH Project worked with GSOP (Granite State Organizing Project) to advocate for the residents of Bronstein Housing Project; wrote letters to the Editor and met with Bronstein residents.
- Nashua Housing Meetings – Members of the EHH Project attended Continuum of Care and Nashua Housing Authority meetings to stay abreast of Bronstein plans and other issues regarding homelessness.
- Community Suppers – Organized 3rd Sunday of the month community suppers with many church volunteers.
- Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter – Made casseroles/served dinners monthly for the Soup Kitchen (UU Nashua has a long history with these commitments).

2. Within the next 18 months we will find a way to track the number of volunteers associated with our church working in the associated organizations and the hours spent volunteering, and will double both numbers.

This proved to be the most difficult piece of this Priority to achieve. In Spring of 2012, a survey was circulated to the congregation asking for responses concerning individuals’ volunteer hours. There was very poor response. Feedback from congregants was neutral to negative in tone. We have not accomplished this part of the Priority.

3. Within the next 18 months we will donate, as a church, at least \$10,000 to the associated organizations.

- In actuality, we surpassed our goal: Outreach Collections – Dedicated Outreach Collections to Front Door Agency (\$5,722), Lamprey Health Care (\$2,877), Southern NH Fuel Assistance (\$4,149), and DCYF (\$2,821).

Suggested change/revision of this Priority:

All-Church Social Justice Project Involve all church members and friends, including children, in ending hunger and homelessness. This project has 4 parts: education, advocacy, service, and financial support.

1. Within the next 2 years we will make at least 6 major efforts (events, publications, or the like) which will serve to educate our church members and friends, as well as the wider community, about this project and the underlying issues. This education will include information about how individuals can become involved in solving the problems that contribute to hunger and homelessness.
2. Identify and work with individual members of the congregation who may have resources or are able to access resources that could be applied to the goals of this project. ***This is a replacement of the previous #2 part. This focuses the congregants to think of how each individual can help. Gives empowerment to each person to bring their talent/time to the task.
3. Within the next 2 years we will donate, as a church, at least \$15,000 to the associated organizations.

Information gathered reflects input from EHH Project Committee (Ellen Barr, Bob Keating, Hilary Keating, Jerry Ross, Elaine Thomas, Sarah Widhu) as compiled in their report (published in the ??? 2013 UU Nashua Newsletter) and discussed at the May 7, 2013 EHH Project Committee Meeting.