

Board of Trustees Retreat
August 8, 2015

Members present: Linda Feters, Margaret Lawrence, Judy Pate, Joe Pierce, Jillian Whitbeck, Sylvia Wilson

Members absent: Kerri Cockerham

Ex-officio members: Rev. Roger Mohr, DRE Lauren Cantatore-Causey, Ex-president Angela Leach
(absent)

Guest facilitator: Bobbi Reed

Board president Margaret Lawrence welcomed everyone to the retreat. Rev. Mohr provided centering words. Bobbi Reed reviewed the agenda and led the group in a team-building exercise.

Margaret invited input from the board members who were on last year's board. Members were encouraged to share accomplishments, thoughts, and unfinished business. Accomplishments included improved electronic communications between the church leadership and the congregation, including an improved website and newsletter. The process for hiring a second-year interim minister went more easily and efficiently than last year. When we experienced sudden losses in our church leadership, people stepped up to fill the voids. A good job was done on combining the areas of finance, stewardship, and fundraising into an overarching group called the financial planning committee. We were able to get the building a much-needed power wash and plan for the front to be repainted.

There was discussion of some difficulties and disruptions experienced initially with last year's interim minister. In the end, our conflict resolution process proved beneficial. We still need to continue improving communication between the board and the congregation, and between the congregation and the wider community.

The 2014 board covenant was reviewed and discussed. Consensus was to delete the portion on Check-in and Centering and to add a line, "Limit personal use of cell phones and tablets during the meeting." All board members will sign the covenant at the August 20 board meeting, and the president will read the covenant at the start of each meeting.

Bobbi Reed discussed the Parker Team Member Style Surveys that the board members participated in. It is intended to show the strengths and challenges of the group as a whole. Board members were encouraged to be mindful of the profile when interacting as a group.

Following a break, Margaret led the group in a discussion of the challenges faced by the church this year and determined strategies and goalsetting to work on the issues.

Financial Solvency

The first item on the "Challenges and Goalsetting" list was financial solvency. Margaret commented that Robin and John Kennedy did an excellent job on the 2014 canvass and passed along a well-organized set of materials for the next canvass team. She also summarized the budget cuts that had been necessary for 2015 because of the reduced number of "excellent" pledgers and the loss of some members.

Rev. Mohr said that we should target "empty-nesters" as new members because they are at the peak of their earning and have more administrative and leadership skills. If we aren't able to afford a full-time minister, there is not a large pool of ministers who would like a part-time job. Because we have a reputation with the UUA as a good church, we may be able to obtain a minister even if we are at the low end of the recommended salary range. Rev. Mohr commented that there are "Chalice Lighter" grants available for advertising for new members, but that all UU churches are having a hard time with their budgets.

Bobbi recounted that we used to advertise on NPR during their newscasts. The ads were funded by asking for individual donors.

Rev. Mohr recommended that we should build a following on social media outlets such as Facebook. He also said that we should obtain e-mail addresses of all visitors to add to our mailing list. A third idea was to increase and diversify our programming to attract target groups. Bobbi Reed commented that one method to attract and keep members is to make our programming relevant to people's lives. She used Bay Area Fellowship as an example of presenting relevant programs because they target younger people and also have a big sign (and advertising). Rev. Mohr added that we have an excellent facility which will help to attract new members, and that we shouldn't hide the building and signage behind shrubbery. It was mentioned that Bay Area Fellowship also does mass mail outs and sends members on foot through neighborhoods with flyers. Rev. Mohr commented that UU theology is aimed at the middle class. It has a very specific culture that attracts professional people and the intelligentsia, and that this can both enhance and limit growth.

Judy asked why should we want to grow? Do we want to share what we have in this church with others? Will it improve our church community? In order to grow, we can't keep a homogeneous congregation. We need more diversity. A comment was made that new members *do* want to be on committees; they want to be a part of the group.

The endowment committee was briefly discussed. It is now in limbo but is in the process of being revived. The chair should announce at least twice a year the purpose of the endowment fund and promote donations.

Margaret stated that in order to pledge amounts increase our members need to prioritize the church in their personal budgets, based on what our church means to them. Rev. Mohr commented he is willing to preach about responsibility (i.e., prioritizing the church) in his sermons. Margaret suggested having another Dave Ramsey financial workshop series to help people with their budgets. Consensus was that if some members are financially unable to pledge more, they should give more of their time, talents, and skills to the church.

Bobbi commented that we are most successful in fundraising when we have a specific goal, such as the capital campaign for the new building.

Rev. Mohr said we should talk to our biggest donors about pledging generously. He said he would be willing to talk to our professionals who are underpledging.

Announcements from the pulpit are critical for successful fundraising. Reminding people weekly to buy HEB cards, asking for members to put Just One Dollar into the plate, etc., are important.

There was a brief discussion on using electronic payment services to make it easier for members to pay their pledges, for HEB cards, and for fundraising events.

Staff and Leadership Resignations

Margaret listed the recent staff, volunteer and officer resignations and asked Rev. Mohr to speak from the pulpit about our need to fulfill our commitments. We can't handle a budget crisis and personnel crisis at the same time. Rev. Mohr suggested holding exit interviews when people resign. He also commented that the membership committee needs to find out why members or potential members leave the church. The attrition rate for UU churches is 10-20% per year.

Tolerance of Different Belief Systems

A survey of the congregation's beliefs would aid the search committee in finding a settled minister who would help us tolerate/accept each other's beliefs. Rev. Mohr commented that we must first find out which direction we want the church to go before determining what kind of minister we want. He said that recently some UU churches have begun bypassing theology and replacing it with social justice. This tends to lead to a lot of angry people in the church. The word **vision** is becoming a central concept: what a church is trying to build. We need to determine what the center of our church is, and what we would like it to be. He stated that he will be talking about "ubuntu" - making each other stronger through our compassion and humanity. He said respect is probably a better word to use than tolerance in these discussions.

Bobbi described our most recent visioning workshop (in 2009). She said we should review the old one and evaluate how we are doing. She will send her 2009 workshop notes to board members.

Setting Goals

Membership Goals. Rev. Mohr said we need to decide whether we want to reach the next level of membership. We are currently a family church. The next stage is a pastoral church, and the third stage is a program church. A pastoral church requires a different kind of minister who has more authority and is a much more central figure. In a family church everyone knows most of the members, but in a pastoral church, different "tribes" form and the minister is required to mediate between the groups since members no longer know everyone in the church. We need to survey the congregation to see if they really want to reach the next level, or if they would be more comfortable staying at the family church level.

The board set the following goal:

- 1. Determine the type and size church that the congregation wants, and move in that direction.**

Rev. Mohr will talk to the congregation about the pros and cons of the family church model vs. the pastoral church model. We can hold a special congregational meeting as part of a first Sunday luncheon to do the survey data collection and develop a consensus statement. A huge amount of data is unnecessary. Rev. Mohr agreed to talk to the congregation during the August 23 service and then lead the meeting to determine the direction in which the congregation wants to move.

Communication (Information Dissemination). The board discussed the various methods of communication we are currently using. Rev. Mohr commented that we seem to have good methods, but we can't force people to read them. Those members who complain that they don't know what's happening are not reading what's in their email in-boxes. It was commented that as an aging church population several of our members do not have Internet access, and that, in any case, there remains the problem of how to deal with many church members receiving delayed or insufficient information about church activities.

Joe suggested that we present a bulleted list of decisions made at each board meeting. Rev. Mohr suggested that we publish the agenda in the church foyer before the meeting. Judy volunteered to summarize the decisions made for each agenda item and post it on a wall where members can easily read it.

The following additional goals were approved:

- 2. Improve communication between church leadership and the congregation.**
- 3. Improve communication between the church and the wider community.**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Fetters