

## **Report from the Sunday Programming Task Force to the Board**

### **Task Force Participants**

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### **Our Assignment**

In September, 2012, the UUCQC made a shift to a two service model for Sunday Worship as part of our strategic plan to foster growth in both vitality and membership within our congregation. Concerns for overcrowding in both the sanctuary and the parking lot were also factors which led to this decision. Periodic assessment and minor modifications have been done since then. As we began our fourth year with the two service model, the board believed it appropriate that a more thorough review of our Sunday morning programming be implemented so that we can determine if the shift has helped us to meet our mission and vision for the congregation.

The Board of Trustees created a task force to conduct this evaluative, reflective process and to provide a report to the Board and the Minister so that planning for the 2016-2017 service schedule can be informed by an assessment of our current Sunday programming. This task force, comprised of representatives from the Board, the relevant Sunday programming teams (RST, Music, YRE, Welcome and Forum) and at-large congregational members was tasked with the following charge:

- 1) Evaluate the extent to which the current model for Sunday programming is meeting the intended goals to foster congregational growth, alleviate overcrowding and enhance the mission and vision of our congregation as a vital, welcoming and diverse community.
- 2) Brainstorm different ideas for Sunday programming model which might impact its effectiveness as pertains to the larger mission and vision of the congregation.
- 3) Provide opportunities for full congregational input regarding the Sunday programming, as well as targeted outreach for input to those constituencies, teams and congregational demographic groups (such as young families, seniors, RE parents, etc.) which may be more directly impacted by the structure, schedule and energy of the worship, education and community events on Sunday mornings.
- 4) Create a report which summarizes congregational attitudes, desires and concerns, evaluates the degree to which the structures now in place meet their desired outcomes, and recommends to the Board and the Minister any alterations, amendments, adjustments or transformations of the Sunday programs offered at the UUCQC which the task force deems appropriate for consideration.

## **What We Did**

We began by meeting in October and reviewing the charge set out by the board for the task force. To facilitate the sharing of Information we tried to maintain a Connection Circle environment without judgement or responses to a comment unless a question is posed to the group for comments.

Because the task force was composed of members of the various congregational teams, we asked that they share how the change to two services impacted their particular team. Some couldn't speak to how it is different since they weren't on their teams when there was a single service. They would report at the next meeting.

All have adjusted, music sometimes finds getting a second soloist and/or special music challenging for two services. Choir sings three times per month, once at the early service and twice at the 11:15.

RST feels a little thin because the number of team members is less than several years ago. Welcome has benefitted from the new structure of having the entire congregation as part of a hospitality team.

Religious Education has had strong feedback from families that an early service, 10 am, works best for them. There are too many conflicts with other activities for children and families once you approach the noon hour. They estimate 110 children in about 70 families are enrolled in the program. There have been comments by some parents that they don't want others disciplining their children, some people like the difference in participants for each service and others miss having a mix.

Chimes group likes the two services; since they have prepared and practice to perform once a month, having two performances with the different audiences is appreciated. Forum believes their attendance is about half, 10-20 people each week, what it was when there was only one service.

At this meeting we discussed ways of soliciting information from the entire congregation and who exactly was that. A long discussion ensued, with agreement being the most thorough means of capturing the information we wanted was by survey of members, friends, and others. Several team members, one with expertise in the field of survey analysis, agreed to help prepare and analyze the results.

We also made the decision to gather information from the five congregations contacted by the Strategic Planning Task Force (2013) and asked about their Sunday programming and experience with two services.

Our second meeting on Oct 29 first addressed comments from teams not heard from at the first meeting. The Hospitality Team suggested that a common coffee hour be instituted. The RE team is concerned that we are, in effect, separating the generations with the two services; The Forum team suggested that our survey contain a question to determine how many people would like to attend forum but feel they are obligated to attend the first service.

A discussion took place trying to determine if we are meeting the stated goals of having a second service. No conclusions were reached, but a number of related questions were discussed including; How do we get more people to attend the Sunday services, who is the

congregation, how can we bring more of the "program people" into greater involvement with the congregation. We discussed the nature of questions to ask the congregations we are contacting. A subset of the task force would meet to devise questions to ask the other congregations and respond to the entire Task Force by email. Five task force members volunteered to make these contacts by mid-December.

Our third meeting on November 12 heard the reports about several of the congregations we contacted and the work beginning on the design and questions for the congregational survey by several members of the task force.

In December, we reviewed the reports from all the other congregations and started reviewing questions for the congregational survey. We chose January to launch the survey and agreed that a spotlight on Jan 10 would be the invitation to participate. Jay invited people to participate through the newsletter. Closing date for the survey would be January 31.

On January 4 we met for the last time before the launch of the survey to make final revisions to the questions. We have worked with the administrative team to make sure the survey gets to members, friends, participants in programs and others who support the congregation. Multiple avenues were available to respond to the survey.

As responses to the survey came into Google form, task force members could review the results. All names were blinded to task force members. John Dunsheath started working on a report format to be prepared for the Board and due March 1.

We met on February 3 to hear the preliminary results of the survey. We are all incredibly thankful to Mindi Mull. With her expertise, she is able to provide analysis from our survey that is incredible helpful and detailed. Much of the meeting time was spent reviewing possible Sunday morning scheduling scenarios based on all we have learned. Sections of the final report were assigned to task force members to write up for the next meeting. Because two of our group were unable to attend and one had to leave early, more discussion of options will take place on Feb 19.

The meeting on February 19 was attended by all task force members with the exception of John Dunsheath. We went through the first draft of the report in great detail and those changes are reflected in the current document. We also discussed the possibility of a forum team.

Instead of a long list of Sunday programming options, we discussed all the options and decided to look at two. At the end of this document are the implications/potentials for each of these options. Before submitting anything to the board, we felt it critical to get feedback from RE parents about possible time preferences. This was done on Sunday, February 21 and the results are included later in this report. This version was revised on February 22 and again on February 26 with all the sections completed.

## What We Found Out

**From speaking with other congregations:** Five UU congregations were contacted and asked the questions below. The congregations were First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, Iowa; Countryside Unitarian Universalist Church, Palatine, Illinois; Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria, Illinois; Quimper UU Fellowship, Port Townsend, Washington; First Unitarian Church in Toledo, Ohio; the same five congregation used in the current Strategic Plan on Growth, 2014. Some questions and answers are not included here, but are available in the index.

### 1. How many people does your Sanctuary seat?

- a. no answer - Des Moines
- b. Approx. 200 - Palatine
- c. around 300 - Peoria
- d. 180 – Port Townsend
- e. about 250 people – Toledo

### 2. What was the Sunday Worship attendance when you went to two services? Does that include children and adults?

- a. Reverend Stringer stated that they went to two services sixteen years ago and it was the interim minister who began the program a year before Mark accepted the call. The idea behind going to two services was to create the opportunity for growth and it was some years before the growth took place but now they have two services with RE at both services. When I asked for attendance figures, Mark stated that he could get back to me with those but my feeling is that he won't unless pressed. – Des Moines
- b. There was only a very moderate increase in attendance with the switch - Palatine
- c. never been at 2 services – Peoria
- d. We have been with 2 services for over 12 years. We build a new sanctuary and still needed 2 services. One is almost full, the 2nd is 1/3 full. – Port Townsend
- e. They only have 1 service - Toledo

### 3. What is the current average Sunday Worship attendance at each service?

- a. They continue to experiment with times but currently have services at 9:15 and 11:00. Both services are identical. – Des Moines
- b. 1<sup>st</sup> service – approx. 40, 2<sup>nd</sup> service – varies a lot, ranges from 95 – 120, Currently 320 adult members, 175 children - Palatine
- c. never been at 2 services – Peoria
- d. Adults 9:15 150-180, 11:15 55-85 – Port Townsend
- e. They only have 1 service. – Toledo

**4. What is your experience with switching to multiple services?**

- a. Congregational reaction to the two services was varied. The words Mark used were "cultural pushback". Some members didn't like the change at all; some didn't like the times, but the change is now permanent and accepted. The growth in attendance was partially due to some other things they did at the time but Mark didn't have enough time to elaborate. This year, attendance numbers have dipped and Mark thinks that this is common to most congregations regardless of denomination. – Des Moines
- b. Mixed – many of the older members were unhappy. Some members are still unhappy, but most have adapted. The long-time members often indicate they miss the intimacy of having one-service. Rev. Krivchenia believes they are "romanticizing the past." She thinks it might take another couple of years before things are calm or they decide to go back to one service (she is very against going back). – Palatine
- c. never been at 2 services – Peoria
- d. Space requires it. RE is at 9:15 only, makes for the lopsided numbers but families didn't want to be divided up. Though some don't come because it is too early. – Port Townsend
- e. 2 years ago they were beginning to outgrow the parking lot.
  - i. They started posing the question of going to 2 services. Then, they had a flood, and were out of their building for 5 months. This brought down attendance. The minister just left. This brought down attendance. They will be looking into an interim until July of next year. – Toledo

**5. Did going to two services impact worship attendance and membership? Did you implement changes other than services at the same time that impacted growth?**

- a. no answer - Des Moines
- b. Rev. Krivchenia doesn't think so. - Palatine
- c. never been at 2 services – Peoria
- d. Growth impacts overall. (Robert Latham's Moving on From Church Folly Lane, in a nutshell) – Port Townsend
- e. They only have 1 service – Toledo

**6. We have numerous programs where participants attend but never attend Sunday worship or connect to the Congregation any other way. Do/did you have a similar situation and if so how (if at all) have you addressed that?**

- a. They have the same situation we do of many people coming to programs other than Sunday Service and Mark thinks that this is due to changing cultural expectations and we all need to accept this. He didn't have any helpful ideas about how to make these people part of the congregation but stated that if we figured it out he would buy the book without hesitation. – Des Moines
- b. No answer – Palatine
- c. Yes some. Have try to be inviting, but no systematic plan. – Peoria
- d. Yes, we have an active Adult RE and lots just do those. Sunday morning head count doesn't reflect the number of people involved. – Port Townsend
- e. No answer – Toledo

## 7. How is your Children Religious Education structured and how do you combine it with your service?

- a. They do something very interesting with the children during the service which I can talk to the RE people about later. They also have a Wednesday evening RE program mostly for OWL and ROPE activities. - Des Moines
- b. No answer - Palatine
- c. About 130 enrollment, not sure how many attend - Peoria
- d. Kids begin each Sunday in the sanctuary – this is our favorite way to have multi-gens. About 15-20 minutes, sometimes a story, or conversation, sometimes ceremony, Child Dedication, New members, etc. RE is only at 9:15. When we first went to 2 services we had RE at both. There were too few families attending at 11:15 to build community. We all wish we could have one service and RE at 10:00, but it isn't feasible. – Port Townsend
- e. No answer – Toledo

### **From our congregational survey:**

There is one appendix attached to this document concerning the information gathered from our congregation. It is an in-depth survey analysis done by task force member, Mindi Mull. Mindi has a PhD. in Developmental Psychology, over 15 years of research experience which includes presenting her research at national conferences, publishing her research, and teaching courses in research design and analysis. We were fortunate to have her expertise in designing the survey and evaluating the results.

#### *Summary of Results prepared by Mindi Mull:*

When looking at the overall results, respondents were fairly evenly split between positive and negative perceptions/opinions of the current two-service model. After breaking the responses down by various demographic groups, trends with age and which Sunday service is typically attended emerged. In general, older survey respondents and those who typically attend the second service were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the current model and express a desire to return to one service.

Younger survey respondents and those who typically attend the first service were more likely to express satisfaction with the current model. Because these two variables (age and which service is attended) are correlated, that is second service tends to be more heavily attended by older congregants and first service tends to be more heavily attended by younger congregants, it is unclear which variable is the stronger predictor.

If age is the stronger predictor, it may be that those who had more experience with the previous one service model are less happy with the two service schedule. If which Sunday service is typically attended is the stronger predictor, the dissatisfaction may be due to lower attendance at this service compared to first service.

## What We Agree Upon

- Our congregation has several different demographic groups, all of which need to be accommodated in Sunday programming
- Our Sunday programming must include:
  - Worship service
  - Children's RE
  - Forum
  - Coffee hour(s)
- Total attendance at Sunday worship services has not yet increased appreciably since going to two services.
- What has increased is the number of people who are attending additional programming (such as Drum Circle, Adult RE, Earth-based programming, meditation) but not attending Sunday service.
- The number of participants in Children's RE has increased each year; we don't know how this relates to having the two services. The time for the RE program is critical to its success.
- In the past two years, we have had a number of long standing attenders leave the area. These were people who attended service and forum regularly. We also have a significant number of snowbirds who are gone each winter and may eventually move away.

## Additional Input:

What is the optimal time for RE for our current participating families?

To this end, we asked Jeanne Nakamura and Sarah Moulton to create a simple survey that was shared with families in person and by email on Sunday, February 21. It asked for each of the three times in question, 9:30, 10 and 10:30, were they very likely, likely or not likely to participate in RE if it was held at that time. As of 10 pm on Sunday, Sarah reported that out of the 70 families, she has already had responses from 38. Here are those results:

9:30am service:  
Very Likely - 13  
Likely - 9  
Not Likely - 16

10am service:  
Very Likely - 28  
Likely - 9  
Not Likely - 1

10:30am service:  
Very Likely - 17  
Likely - 11  
Not Likely - 10

**Questions for the Board to address:**

- How do we best meet the needs of the various demographic groups in our congregation, for example, families with young children, older adults, and singles?
- How can we attract to our Sunday Services the various people who attend our weekly programming events (Drum Circle, Meditation Group, etc,) and how can we encourage people into further congregational engagement?
- What Sunday morning service configuration will result in the most welcoming, vibrant and diverse service(s)?
- How do we respond to questions asked in the Congregational Survey?
- How to increase attendance to our Sunday service(s)? It is a fact that this Task Force would not exist if our Sunday services had greater attendance.

**If we decide to continue with two services:**

- How do we improve a sense of community within the congregation? Unless there is a common time shared by both services, we may continue with this concern. This may improve with a common event shared by both services (coffee time), growth so that larger numbers of people attend each service or through more small group social events that help people get connected beyond the superficial. It was suggested we purchase some high top tables for standing conversations for the community room and the lounge.
- Another possibility would be through more intergenerational services throughout the year when just one service would be offered on a particular Sunday. This discussion began with a meeting between RST, RE and Jay on Saturday morning.
- How do we handle the dissatisfaction of some of our members who want to return to one service? Since we don't know why they feel this way, it is difficult to answer the concern.
- Doesn't change workload for RST, minister, music, etc.

**If we decide to have one service each Sunday:**

- We would need to modify the Strategic Plan and consider response from Future Funders.
- What time is the single service? Families with children seem to prefer an early start while our demographic data would indicate older adults would prefer a later start. Relevant to this question is information collected by Sarah from RE families. We made no reference to one or two services, only possible times for RE.
- Explore offering childcare during Forum to encourage participation by younger members.
- Reduces workload for minister, RST, hospitality and others.
- Will this result in the vibrant community people remember?
- How will this impact sanctuary and parking space?