

Subgroup 2: MEMBERSHIP

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Ideas detailed here were culled from the group discussions and communications, as well as from the following documents: "RRUC Strategic Plan 1997-2002;" "Report from Membership Working Group May 2004;" and, from the Baltimore Washington Growth Planning Committee, "A Plan for Vital Congregations March 2005."

6/14/05

Definition of theme/area: We defined membership very broadly as the process of attracting, welcoming and integrating new members; and retaining existing members by establishing, promoting and supporting systems and a culture of acceptance, inclusion, personal growth and spiritual community.

Provocative Propositions/ Ideal Visions / Goals:

1. Be visible, welcoming and engaging to prospective guests and prospective members.
2. Support a spiritual culture in which new members are welcomed, people are nurtured and everyone finds opportunities for growth.
3. Attain levels of commitment (including volunteer time and financial support) needed to sustain the work of a vibrant and active congregation.

Key Actions and Activities / Objectives:

1. Increase the number of guests by 10% annually.
2. Grow the congregation - at least 5% net growth over 5 years - recognizing the potential negative impact of building/renovation and loss of a minister, as well as the potential positive impact of completing the new building.
3. Communicate that we welcome new members, as well as the expectations and benefits of membership to newcomers and members.
4. Create and nurture a culture of congregation-wide involvement in the entire process of membership. Encourage all members to engage others (guests, friends and members) regarding opportunities for, and benefits of, membership and participation in the life of the congregation. Use a systematic approach while allowing for personal styles and individual needs.
5. Involve ministers, congregational leaders and Sunday service programs in communicating our openness to new members, as well as the opportunities, benefits and responsibilities of membership and active involvement in the life of the congregation.
6. Intentionally and personally engage guests and newcomers to discover their interests, and introduce them to others and to programs that meet their needs.
7. Maintain member engagement through life stages and transitions.
8. Maximize opportunities for self-actualization and for learning from each other by encouraging all to explore and express their passions, share others' passions, and maintain tolerance regarding diverse points of view.

9. Ensure that we are both understandable to people (so that they know who we are and what we do), and that we are understanding of prospective new members' needs.
10. Promulgate consistent messages about membership, both internally and externally.
11. Promote and/or publicize RRUC to the outside community.
12. Encourage and prepare members/friends to talk about Unitarian Universalism and RRUC when opportunities arise.
13. Develop the awareness and skills of RRUC leadership, committee persons and staff with regard to membership management capabilities. Maximize the capabilities and use of All Church System (RRUC's database management software).
14. Proactively manage change and anticipate possible concerns about growth, feelings about community as the size of the congregation increases, and proselytizing.

Demonstrating Reality / Methods:

1. Sustain covenant groups and promote other small group efforts (e.g., men's and women's groups, potluck dinners, neighborhood gatherings, etc.).
2. Conduct regular individual inquiries to members regarding their needs (separate from Stewardship Campaign).
3. Create more thorough greeting process, including: escorting individual guests to seating; showing them around; introducing them to others; finding out about them and helping them make connections.
4. Ask guests to stand and be recognized during services in a way that is non-threatening and optional.
5. Develop a buddy system for newcomers.
6. Maximize Adult Education efforts to address objectives (especially engagement and personal growth):
 - a. teach members (new and established) how to make connections
 - b. ask ministers to conduct courses in their areas of expertise
 - c. offer in-depth courses on UU theology and history
 - d. create and support small groups to help people make connections
 - e. promote New UU, UU University, UU theology, UU history course, and other spiritual/self-discovery courses
7. Plan marketing and community outreach:
 - a. obtain census and UUA information regarding area demographics
 - b. sponsor "Morning Edition" or "All Things Considered" locally
 - c. buy targeted mailing lists and send targeted letters (e.g., families with elementary age children in specific zip code areas)
 - d. invite larger community to RRUC events and activities
 - e. make use of free listings of activities in local papers
 - f. promote RRUC at the Bazaar, Wednesday night meditation groups, neighborhood meetings, and other appropriate events held at RRUC
8. Increase ministerial/Sunday worship efforts in membership goals:
 - a. acknowledge/affirm joys and sorrows (especially sorrows)
 - b. write tributes for newsletters, Sunday Bulletins and/or membership bulletin board to acknowledge/thank groups and individuals
 - c. periodically devote a Sunday to "growing a soul"
 - d. periodically devote a Sunday to "what we do"

- e. periodically devote a Sunday to "elevator speeches"
 - f. periodically address membership/growth issues
 - g. periodically conduct an interactive sermon regarding engagement in the life of the congregation ("roundhouse" seating)
 - h. consider membership "2 minutes" -- a brief statement of why a member joined or how they benefit from participation in RRUC (pre-screened for length) -- at the beginning of services
9. Involve the "Board Member on Duty" in making connections by briefly describing why they came to RRUC, what they do at RRUC, giving their "elevator speech" and relating how they perceive congregational growth.
 10. Revise the "crying baby" statement in the Sunday Bulletin.
 11. Develop a methodology for personally contacting newcomers and/or those who intend to join to identify their passions, needs and talents. Coordinate all contacts so as not to overwhelm people with competition for their time and effort.
 12. Communicate needs/uses of contributions to the Operating Fund and RRUC's budgetary needs.
 13. Assure that all church communications use consistent language about being open to new members, as well as membership expectations and opportunities. Revise existing brochures to reflect consistent language, and review all brochures annually with regard to membership messages.
 14. Incorporate "A Plan for Vital Congregations" into RRUC's strategic plans. Work with the regional Implementation Committee and utilize resources offered by JPD (including web-based tutorials and lay consultants), and collaborate with area UU congregations to "increase the growth and influence of Unitarian Universalism over a five-year period." [Quoted from the Plan developed by the Baltimore Washington Growth Planning Committee of the JPD, dated March 2005]
 15. Develop ways to hear individual "stories" (e.g., newsletters, Sunday Bulletin, services).
 16. Ask friends to visit and become members.
 17. Consider new member annual reunions, as well as methods to recognize significant membership anniversaries.
 18. Identify and/or create groups to be responsible for creating/nurturing a culture of everyone's involvement in the membership process (including, but not limited to, filling volunteer positions); establish groups and support structures when necessary; model behavior. Identify which group is responsible for each step in the path from attracting guests to on-going membership integration.
 19. Link/coordinate the greeting, ushering and membership processes.
 20. Initiate an annual Membership Committee retreat. Use this forum to plan membership efforts and review trends of guests, new members and those who leave RRUC.