

Bull Run Unitarian Universalists Breakthrough Award Workshop Handout General Assembly, Ft. Lauderdale, FL June 2008

Absolute certain strategies for growth that work for everyone: None

Lessons Learned and Some Things We've Done:

Steps in the Growth Process

- Decision for full-time minister and building purchase used congregational meeting with stick-apply dots for votes on different options (1999)
- Visioning weekend gathered all ages and used multimedia stations (stories, poetry, drama, bumper stickers, kids poster, roundtable discussions) (2004)
- Every recent all-member pledge canvass has integrated growth vision survey questions as part of the one-on-one and small group discussions (2007-2008)
- One-day growth workshops address canvass survey results and focus on specific issues on outreach, move to two services, "safe congregations" work, etc. (2007)
- Current focus is not on heavy advertising but on developing quality programming, adult RE, and engagement with community efforts (Ongoing)

Leadership Development

- Leadership Development Committee (LDC) established with a goal of matching the many gifts of our members with the needs of the congregation
- Leadership Development Committee reviews member volunteer interest forms, works with committee chairs on filling vacancies, and provides ongoing training on running meetings, cross-committee coordination, etc.
- Position descriptions, committee charters, institutional memory of how things are done now uploaded to the BRUU Wiki (like Wikipedia, a user-managed password protected online tool for internal communication)
- Annual Volunteer Fair allows committees to display posterboards with goals and outcomes, creatively illustrate functions and importance, and invite volunteer interest; prizes for best costumes and best display!
- Nominating Committee works with the LDC to identify candidates for the Board and provide them with a clear "reality check" of commitment and expectations of lay leadership
- Collective commitment to end meetings on time and provide clear action items for follow-up



Worship Experience

- Worship Committee works with the minister to provide overall support and direction to the worship program while maintaining eclectic, high-quality worship experiences during non-minister pulpit Sundays. These services include a wide variety, such as member Spiritual Journeys, Burning Baggage at year end, Day of the Dead, Youth Group, Welcoming Congregation, Writing Group, and others
- A family worship circle has evolved to meet parent and children worship co-experience needs; meets 9:15-9:45 am before 10:00 am regular service
- Announcements inserted in Order of Service and written on clipboard for highlighting by Moderator; announcements start with chime 5 minutes before service
- Respect for quiet or meditative music shown by quiet shuffling of hands ("shufflause") rather than applause
- Candle lighting for public Joys and Sorrows and private thoughts during Offertory
- Auction, Green, Canvass or Other Moments are short, inspirational presentations (reminders) between announcements and the start of services

Music

- Strong networking by Music Director helps share ideas and support; copyrights strictly observed
- Prior planning (up to 6 months in advance) among staff for worship and events keeps preparation and quality high
- Support for music learning and performance across all generations
- Awards and recognitions for 5, 10, 15, 20 year members of choir

Community-Building

- Discovery Dinners program help address community issues, encourage new group formation, share family music, provide intellectual stimulation, deepen spiritual journeys; come early and pay for a meal, or show up a bit later for programs
- Chalice Groups formed to foster a sense of community through small group ministry
- BRUU Players formed to provide entertainment while Fun Raising, and to work with minister for service skits and drama
- Family Retreat planned and held in late June or July includes outdoor hikes, games, shared music, campfire stories, varied workshops, and family worship; fee covers housing and some food costs

Fun Raising

- Auction serves as a fellowship engine by providing a yearly schedule of small and large events; no entry fee, online and hard copy submission forms, a laptop station for submission during fellowship, cohorts of auctioneers with humor-driven, homespun auctioneering, funny events between auction sets, bidding proxy forms, dinner and event slots opening up during the year are offered to newcomers
- Every member canvass recruits 30-40 canvassers, provides each training and a full notebook of information, recommended procedures, budget charts and assigned member contact information; one-on-one and small group canvass sessions cover growth and vision issues as well as clarification of a giving chart; weekly updates are provided via Canvass Moments before services start
- Stewardship Dinner is a night of conviviality, entertainment and dancing with no spreadsheets or heavy dunning involved; BRUU Players provide dramatic entertainment, the canvass theme is emphasized but not force fed

Membership/Fellowship

- Provide both visitor and new member packets, with a follow-up card and a minister phone call after second visit
- New Member dinners to orient newcomers, explore interests and perceptions, and share fellowship
- Directory with pictures to facilitate recognition and fellowship among new and old congregants

Communication, Internal

- BRUU broadcast is a listserv for distribution of general BRUU-related announcements via e-mail; BRUU polylog is another optional listserv that encourages discussion about services, church policies, happenings, etc.; both are moderated
- The BRUU Wiki provides Frequently Asked Questions, helps share formal and informal knowledge, keeps annual reports and other documents available and editable as structure evolves.
- Regular meetings of committee chairs are held to encourage sharing of ideas, work through jurisdictional issues, and provide mutual support
- Several bulletin and white boards are available around the building, including membership information, social justice initiatives, an area "map" of our membership, signup sheets for Discovery Dinners, and an important "Where is my meeting?" board.
- An Annual Report is generated every year with an updated history timeline, letters from the staff and leadership, committee reports, and minutes and outcomes from congregational meetings; this also provides valuable institutional memory

Communication, External

- The web site has been reorganized and is designed to provide members and newcomers as much information as possible without revealing too much personal information
- Newsletters are posted monthly, sent via e-mail, and also sent hard copy on request
- The minister's sermons are podcast from the web site and have also brought several newcomers into our community
- Informational cards are provided in the pews for people to take and share; they include contact information and our principles and mission.

Social Justice

- Fourth Sunday Soup and bread lunch plus dance fundraiser for local community support services
- Substantial and growing contribution to area food needs with a Food Pantry
- Monthly Split the Plate offerings benefitting various county and non-profit organizations