



LOVE &
LIGHT
FROM THE
MOUNTAINS
TO THE SEA

Touchstone

May, 2009

*A Quarterly Communication for Small Unitarian Universalist Congregations of the
Northern New England District Unitarian Universalist Association
NNED-UUA Small Church Specialist, Rev. Karen Brammer*

In this issue you will find

- Three great practices of small congregations
- Results of a workshop on recruiting volunteers in small congregations
- Announcements

Great Practices

First Universalist Church of Pittsfield, ME -
www.pittsfielduu.org

Reaching Out

As the heavy snow and cold of winter fell in New England, and fuel prices soared, the leadership of this congregation considered how hard it was going to be to keep their doors open and their own families warm. Like most other small congregations they closed off the hardest to heat areas of the building, but they did something else. They realized that they had this building and each other to get through the tough time ahead while many of their neighbors did not. And so they acquired 25 weatherization kits from the state, gathered 80 volunteers in a community of 1500, and insulated 25 buildings in one morning. The event was so successful that a regular expanded food program, relying on multiple community organizations working together, has continued.

UU Society of Laconia, NH - www.uusl.org

Deepening Community

When asked when the congregation feels most connected and when they have the most fun together many answer, "Our worship". Wonderful music is woven into the theme of worship and each service ends with everyone

connecting as a circle. What some congregations do in small group ministry, this congregation does in many small groups of connection such as a men's breakfast, the women's book club, the circle of pastoral care workers, parents of young children, and the choir. The congregation has also reached out to be good neighbors to the Bhutanese refugee community by gathering together, offering rides and other things necessary to begin their new life in the North East. All of this combines to create a deepening sense of community.

**Mount Mansfield UU Fellowship of
Jericho, VT -** www.mmuuf.org

Can Do Spirit

This congregation is a lay led fellowship that has won a Chalice Lighter grant that will, in combination with their dedicated fellowship, fundraising and additional grants, create a new worship space in a barn they have been renovating as their church. Just as exciting and perhaps even more of a cornerstone in their life, is the way they have lifted serving the children of the congregation as a priority. This merry band of UUs has almost as many children as adults in their community!



If you have something to share that might benefit other small congregations, please email the Small Church Specialist, Karen, at kbrammer@uua.org

Small and Vital

Volunteer Recruitment: 'Tis the Season

In February of 2009, leaders from small congregations in VT and NH gathered to talk about lay leadership development, that is, volunteer recruitment. It became clear that as congregations we tend to do best when we remember that church life cycles around (with some parts of the cycle more comfortable than others), when we look beyond ourselves, and when we balance work with fun and community.



Sharing stories of volunteer experiences in our congregations, we discovered that leadership in small congregations is rarely just management (fixing things, deciding things) or just visionary (asking powerful questions to help guide the congregation, being less anxious in anxious situations.) Where there are fewer volunteers, more of us have to be leaders who manage things and lead with vision and calm. We also shared stories of our worst volunteer experiences. Here's the group's list of what makes for a bad volunteer leadership position in a congregation:

- Felt like the 'bad guy' for having to hold boundaries
- Not a good match between my skills and the role I took
- Not prepared or supported
- Took the role because of pressure to do so (internal or external)
- Felt overburdened in life
- The role was not part of my nature
- Did not feel supported because people did not join in to help
- This is the list of what created individuals' best volunteer experiences:

- The job fit my skills or skills I wanted to develop
- I had some preparation and training
- I was allowed to be creative and somewhat autonomous
- Had support at home and in the congregation
- Felt I could make a difference and was able to be passionate about it
- Fun. Challenging, exciting
- Opportunity to be around others I considered wise
- The congregation was really ready so there was great communication and it was a dynamic experience
- Mutual respect
- It stretched me in serving a need
- I was thanked

More than selling a task? What are we actually doing when we invite people into congregational leadership roles?

- Nurture people into leadership
- Help people engage in the congregation where they are most interested
- Help people develop their skills and engage in spiritual growth
- Create opportunities to serve
- Help people feel ownership in the church
- Help people feel their own niche in the church
- Help people feel joy in the church.
- Match individual needs with the needs of the congregation or fellowship.
- Create opportunities as paths for spiritual search and action – living our beliefs



Four-pronged approach to filling leadership roles in the church:

1. Talk about what the congregation needs (Rather than what jobs are vacant) Create job

descriptions that are clear and have a beginning and an ending (term limits)

2. Learn what individuals need

3. Invite people to take on leadership roles based on matching as much as possible 1 and 2
(Identify specific individuals in the congregation who may be ready to be asked/invited to engage in a leadership role)

4. Support and thank people in those roles



QUESTIONS the group brainstormed that might be asked of congregants to learn what role might meet who they are and what gifts they both need and offer:

- What are you called to do? What is your vocation?
- What are your passions? Your interests?
- What talents do you have that you can add/share with our church community?
- What can this congregation do for you?
- What involvement in the church would bring you joy? Satisfaction?
- What kind of involvement would make you feel a part of the congregation?
- Let's get to know each other. Would you like to go hiking, biking, kayaking, etc...?
- Would you share with me what you love being involved with?
- What have you liked about the church?
- Do you have any questions about how things work here?
- Is there anything you've heard or seen here that you would like to know more about?
- What are a couple of things you hope to find here?
- What's the riskiest thing you have ever done that you enjoyed?

Announcements



2009 General Assembly

Our Association of Congregations Decides and Acts - PLEASE VOTE IN THE UUA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

<http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/>

Grant for Congregational Presidents wishing to attend GA 2009

<http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/updatesannouncements/119425.shtml>

If you cannot go to Salt Lake City GA 2009, consider this: video stream some of the proceedings of GA and watch as a congregation or group of congregations contact Karen Brammer at kbrammer@uua.org.