

Strategic Plan for Growth and Engagement at CVUU

2-5-19

Team Members: Howard Adams, Rob Curran, Elisa Dickon (Chair), Tasha Dockery, Perry Duncan, David Howell, Clark Mahoney, Laura Moss, Anne Odell, Rev. Justine Sullivan

Introduction and Background

The Growth and Engagement Committee received the following Charge from the CVUU Board of Directors:

Create a three-year strategic plan for growing and engaging the membership of CVUU.

The Committee was charged with creating a strategic plan with goals focused on growing and engaging the CVUU membership over the next three years. Growing the congregation included attracting new members from all sectors. Engagement included engaging new members in the church life and retaining existing members. The objectives and action steps related to each of the goals provide guideposts, focus our actions and lead to successful plan implementation.

In some cases, the recommendations in this plan involve work by various CVUU committees. It is not the intention of this group to direct the work of other groups or individuals within the church but rather to identify areas where committees might find a way to incorporate the shared goals of growth and engagement in their on-going work.

Lastly, this plan also includes area for future learning, exploration, and development.

The Board asked that the Committee monitor the implementation of the Plan during its first year and provided \$2,000 in the FY 18-19 Budget for implementation.

Attraction of New Members

Attracting new members requires strategic thinking about who our customers are. A comprehensive analysis should be conducted to examine characteristics such as natural affinities, geography, demographics, and like-minds in term of our Principles. This information will be incorporated into the development of programs and actions to attract members.

Communication and Outreach

The goals and steps in this area relate to communication and outreach, specifically:

Update Website

It is well understood that today most potential visitors investigate websites before traveling to a congregation to see what it is like. This is our front door, and it should be welcoming, attractive, and easy to navigate. *This is the work of the Communications staff and Committee.*

Next Steps

- A team, lead by Laura Moss, analyzed our current website and prepared the attached "The CVUU Website Initial Assessment" which provides direction and next steps for re-invigorating our website.
- Consider a part time paid webmaster which is answerable to the Board. If funding is not available, engage committed volunteers. When hired the webmaster should be part of the Communications Committee.
- Create a form for speakers which gives us permission to put their presentation on You Tube and allows pod host.

Find Natural Community Partners who might not know about us and make our presence known. We are known in Norfolk as a justice-seeking community. We will develop and enhance a similar reputation in Virginia Beach. *This is primarily the work of the Social Justice Committee and has begun.*

Next Steps

- Do some research on who our neighbors are and develop a plan for introducing ourselves to them, for example, a neighborhood open house in August 2019, dropping off flyers or cards at area businesses, schools, etc. The flyers or cards should include the Seven Principles and - some of CVUU's activities.
- Because our congregation is wide spread consider a flyer that all members could have to place in their respective areas to let people know about us.

Continue, consolidate and enhance CVUU's social media presence to promote events and share our story. *This is the work of the Communications staff and Committee.*

Next Steps

- Develop a brand for CVUU through consistent messaging, visuals, cross referencing between information sources, and utilize online information from sub-groups of CVUU (CUUPS, Buddhist).

General Assembly Actions and CVUU's Relationship with Unitarian Universalists Association

Coastal Virginia Unitarian Universalists is a member of the national Unitarian Universalists Association (UUA). In that role we send representation to the annual General Assembly and vote on UU-wide policies and actions. More explicit knowledge and interaction with those actions should be encouraged through increased communication with the congregation.

Next steps

- Annually, Delegates to the General Assembly will share their experience and the actions taken at the General Assembly with the congregation.
- The relationship of CVUU and UUA will be explained to the congregation and new members as part of our grounding in the larger UU community.

Next Steps from the 2016 Strategic Plan

- Develop a publicity campaign to let the community know who we are and what we do
- Consider PSAs on radio stations such as WHRO and WHRV and one other
- Continue to sponsor or co-sponsor local events such as Pridefest or speakers who represent CVUU values
- Reach out to local campus communities

Welcome

Once newcomers find our website or social media sites and decide to visit CVUU, what is their experience of welcome?

Parking

The parking situation at CVUU is greatly improved over the Norfolk property, but it could be a limiting factor for us as we welcome newcomers. Upon arrival in the parking area, it can look full if there are several cars already parked in the closest spaces.

Next Steps-*This is the work of the Grounds Committee*

- Encourage longtime members, musicians arriving early for worship, etc. to park further out from the church building, leaving the closer spaces for newcomers and

- people with mobility challenges.
- Encourage car-pooling. This could be extended to encourage younger members to offer rides to elders who find it difficult to drive, especially to the less familiar new campus.
 - Investigate other nearby parking options with possible shuttle. As we grow, we will exceed our current parking capacity.
 - Re-stripe the parking lot to create more parking spaces
 - Request Environmental Initiative funds to purchase and place a bike rack

Greeting

Most people we have spoken with identify this as a current strength. Newcomers feel warmly welcomed as they enter for worship on Sunday morning and after worship, as well. Much of this welcoming has fallen to a small number of people, however. Our goal is to create and encourage a culture of hospitality and welcome. *This is the work of the Membership Committee.*

Designate ambassadors to engage people on Sunday mornings. These ambassadors augment and release the ushers from work of answering detailed questions so they can usher.

All congregants should be friendly and welcoming. We could designate people to circulate after service to talk with new people.

Pair new people with longer term members in a mentoring and friendship relationship. This would need a coordinator, whether within or outside of an existing committee.

Additional possibilities include special ambassadors for families with children and a teen ambassador for new teens.

Outreach and Connection

After attending a first or second worship service, newcomers should have an easy way to find out how to get more involved. The welcome table provides such an opportunity. Our recommendation is to periodically review the relevance of and interest in the materials we provide. The welcome table could also be a place where newcomers sign up to attend a potluck or get paired with a mentor. Getting involved in the life of the church is the best way to help folks feel welcomed.

Develop a standard practice of following up with newcomers, perhaps asking visitors to indicate their preferred mode of contact and also if they would like to speak with the minister or Director of Religious Education.

Create a comprehensive list of CVUU programs and committees which includes contact persons and is easily available.

Make the CVUU Directory more available to members after getting individuals' permission to share data and establishing rules for use of the directory. Determine whether an app can be used to access the Directory. Indicate in the Directory how people want to be contacted-email, text, phone

Encourage and support new programs for all ages and interests

Deepening

Research in the area of church growth suggests that people often leave or drift away if after 6 to 12 months they haven't entered into the inner circle of a congregation, that is, if they still feel like outsiders. This is a common problem in very small churches where everyone truly does know everyone, and the newcomer really stands out as a "stranger." But even in larger congregations, this insider/outsider issue can emerge if there isn't a clear path for people to go deeper into the work of the church, whether that be in worship, finance and administration,

buildings and grounds, or governance. People want to share their gifts and knowledge and to be included in decision making.

Offer varied Adult education programs

Continue covenant circles, consider adding new groups for new members instead of adding new people to longtime groups.

Pay attention to communication, share information, avoid acronyms or define terms. Keep expanding who we mean by "us."

Share power. Mentor newer folks to take on powerful roles.

Develop new leaders through training. Howard Adams is interested in offering adult education around leadership, possibly in partnership with other lay leaders and with the minister.

Create a multigenerational covenant circle for parents and children where each age group has its own activities.

Retention of Existing CVUU Members

While attracting and engaging new members is important, retaining current members is also important and essential for overall growth. Almost all of the suggestions made above for attraction will also help with retention (frequent, relevant and timely communication; sharing power and developing and encouraging new leaders, and creating a culture of welcome), but there are some specific actions this team recommends focusing more specifically on retention.

Access

Now that we are in the new building, security and access have emerged as significant issues.

Next steps

- Communicate regularly and clearly about new expectations around building use, including cleaning up and locking up.
- Communicate regularly about how to get a key card for off-hours entry into the building.
- Review and update Event Planning sheet so people can more easily plan church events, know how to get a kitchen monitor, arrange for someone to run sound and lights and other basic support activities. Longtime members who assume they know how things work can feel put out when expectations change and they are not aware of the changes. More communication about this will help.

Connection

Creating and enhancing involvement and connection develops a sense of community.

Next steps

- Revive Circle suppers by zip code. This would require coordination and leadership but could help to connect people across generations and longevity.
- Celebrate big milestone membership (10 years, 20 years, etc.) not just new members.
- Ask people about their gifts and interests to match them to work needed in the congregation (both in committees and in shorter-term, task-driven groups).
- Create an Engagement Committee as a sub-committee of Membership. The Committee will match skill and interests of members with needs in the committees and CVUU.
- Use the Building Dedication on April 28 as an opportunity to attract people to serve on the many teams that will be needed.
- Hold a small Committee Fair for several weeks in a row. Instead of every committee recruiting all at once, have a few at a time to highlight their ministry and skills needed.

-Develop a mentoring program between members.

Caring

Taking specific individualized caring actions builds the network of community.

Next steps

- Reach out when someone disappears. This should be done intentionally perhaps by the minister or members with pastoral care experience. We want people to notice when they go away. This team recommends that the minister reach out to members who have left recently to see if there is a rupture that can be repaired and to see if we can learn from the experiences of those who have left. A growing church keeps learning about itself and its ministries.
- Take advantage of Stewardship as a time to check in with members. The Stewardship Committee touches everyone and learns who has dropped out or is no longer attending. They can let the minister know and she will follow up with them.

Implementation of the Recommendations in the Strategic Plan for Growth and Engagement

The Growth and Engagement Committee members will each select sections of the plan to monitor throughout the year. Periodic checks on the progress will focus on progress being made and lead to successful Plan implementation.