

Linkage Report for UUCA Board of Trustees

15 June 2015

From Linkage Committee: Wendy Jessup, Janice Morris, Juliet Purl

The Linkage Committee and Board Chair Steve Brannon recently met with Allen Rafalko, our project consultant, to discuss the results of the Linkage Project held in March, 2015.

Following is a summary of the lessons learned and our next steps.

### Survey Summary

- Our original goal was to collect and analyze data which the Board can use next year to improve our ENDS. Previous input from the Congregation indicates that many believed that the church was good at connecting, growing and serving, they did not feel that they personally did as members of the church.
- We hired Allen Rafalko, M.A. candidate in Organizational Development at American University to guide this initial project. We met several times with Allen and provided him with background information about the church; he also attended one Board meeting. Allen recommended development of a multiple-choice survey and a Gallery Walk focusing on communication methods.
- Allen developed the survey with input from the committee. A link to the survey was provided in Connections and paper copies were made available for those who are more comfortable with hard-copy surveys.
- We also held a “Gallery Walk” in Fellowship Hall after services where congregants were invited to describe a time when they felt that they connected, grew, and/or served as part of UUCA.
- We received a strong sample of responses from the survey and the Gallery Walk in the Fellowship Hall after the service (209 although some may be duplicates).
- The majority of the respondents were in the 65-74 age range, and most said they participated in 1-3 activities in the church in the past year.
- When asked which form of communication worked best, the response was fairly even across the board - with RE Connections email being slightly ahead of Connections, word of mouth, and the order of service.
- Most people responded “Not Sure” in response to a question regarding the most effective way to communicate something they had to share with church leadership. For those who did know, the staff played an important role, followed by the Minister and the Board of Trustees.
- When asked about a time they felt connected to the church, most replied with some element of church activity they were involved in rather than a specific story. 46% said service, 41% said music, 33% said RE, 34% said covenant groups, and 32% said some aspect of teaching or learning.

### Lessons Learned

- We need to go deeper. This is a good first step, but to truly link to the congregation we need to follow up with individuals and groups and learn their stories.
- We have to look for opportunities to have conversations that get to the heart of what it means to connect, grow and serve so we can make our policy guidelines more precise.
- We need to train as a Board to be good listeners - do we know what questions to ask and how best to engage one on one?
- Conversations need to be planned and prepared for so we can go beyond the obvious (ie – “I like Chalice theatre”) to a deeper understanding (“inter-generational interaction makes me feel connected to the church so maybe we can do other things such as connecting RE with Culpepper Garden”).
- Allen recommended we do immediate follow up to events when we set up conversational opportunities (ex: have Board members talk to Covenant Group members right after the series has ended to ask how they connected with the experience and what it meant to them).
- This should happen on an ongoing basis (talk with visitors to Guatemala and GA close upon their return). For example, we should take advantage of significant events, like service trips or powerful Sunday services, to schedule a linkage conversation with a few board members about the difference the event made in people's lives while it's still fresh in their memories.
- Also, it is very important to figure out a way to engage with people who are less active in church - the "silent majority."
- A key challenge will be to develop an effective structure or process for all of these conversations to make sure they provide the information we need for our work in understanding what the congregation wants/needs from our church.
- Use what we learn about linkage and communications to formulate policy next fall.

### To Congregation

- As part of policy governance, the Board must seek out Linkage opportunities with the congregation so we can better establish church policies that reflect their values and goals.
- Our goal was to find out - what does it mean to you personally to Connect, Grow and Serve in relation to the church?

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- To do this effectively, we engaged a pro-bono consultant from American University to lead us in this effort. As a result, we conducted a survey and "Gallery Walk" in the Fellowship Hall to get congregational feedback.
- If you participated, thank you so much!
- Our goal is to take the information we learned and to go deeper in engaging the congregation in a discussion to "discover their stories" so that UUCA can be the church we dreamed of during the Appreciative Inquiry Process as we were developing the call for our new minister.
- We hope you will engage with us on the next step as we continue these efforts to build a beloved community that Connects, Grows and Serves now and into the future.