



## Unitarian Church in Summit, NJ Assessment Visit Report

### SUMMARY

The Unitarian Church in Summit, NJ (UCS) engaged Barry Finkelstein, a Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Congregational Stewardship Consultant, to conduct an Assessment Visit and prepare this report. The assessment explored opportunities to strengthen stewardship, both in terms of annual giving and a potential capital campaign. The findings and recommendations of the assessment are summarized in the following paragraphs and detailed further below.

#### *Commendations*

- The Unitarian Church in Summit is an exceptional UU congregation. UCS was recognized by the UUA in 2010 as a Breakthrough Congregation and was awarded the first-ever Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) Service Award.
- UCS was accepted into and is an enthusiastic participant in the UUA's Leap of Faith Program, seeking to learn from a mentor congregation and grow to the next level.
- The Congregation has a long tradition of excellence in all aspects of church life; has strong programs in religious education, social action, and music; and continues to attract and retain top-quality ministers and staff.

#### *Findings and Observations*

- UCS is ready to burst out in all dimensions, poised to grow dramatically and make an effective transition to a large church. The key is coming together as a community around a shared vision and mission that will inspire broad support and generosity.
- The congregation is doing many things right -- taking steps to strengthen stewardship, bringing on a permanent assistant minister, and sustaining strong programs in religious education, music, and social action. There is much to build on.

#### *Recommendations*

- Strengthen your *Annual Giving Campaign*, building on the progress made this year.
- Develop a strategic plan centered around an inspiring vision and mission that then drives long-term initiatives and resource decisions, including how to address your current facility limitations and infrastructure needs.
- Establish a formal *endowment and planned giving* program to encourage members to make legacy gifts.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Basic Data*

Name and Mailing Address of Congregation	The Unitarian Church in Summit 4 Waldron Ave Summit, NJ 07901-2806
Website Address	www.ucsummit.org
Dates of Visit	April 1-3, 2011
Ministers	Rev. Vanessa Rush Southern Rev. Nicole Kirk
Point of Contact	Tony Obst and Joe Parsons, Co-Chairs, Annual Giving Campaign Committee
Key Leaders re Assessment Visit	Tom Howard, President Susan Kuney, strategic planning Carol Ulmer, capital campaign
Annual Financial Commitments -- 2010 -- 2011	\$560,000; 278 adult pledging households \$615,000; 278 adult pledging households (as of May 17, 2011; campaign not complete)
Number of Members	496
Endowment (Permanent Unrestricted Funds)	\$400,000
Approach to Annual Budget Drive	Introducing one-on-one stewardship conversations with the 2011 campaign

### *Objectives of the Assessment*

UCS stated the following as objectives for the Assessment:

- Raise the congregation's stewardship awareness.
- Help create an annual fund program which can be institutionalized.
- Validate, supplement, and change as necessary the annual fund committee's plans for the annual fund program

### *Steps Already Taken*

The Congregation established an Annual Giving Campaign (AGC) Committee this year and adopted a new approach to the yearly campaign, based on one-on-one stewardship



conversations for a significant share of the membership. UCS engaged Barry to train volunteer “captains” who conducted the visits. This is part of the Congregation’s multi-year effort to institute best practices to deepen and strengthen its stewardship.

The Congregation was selected to participate in the UUA Leap of Faith Program, under which growing churches are paired with successful large churches in a mentoring relationship. UCS is paired with the First Unitarian Church of Dallas and plans to incorporate ideas that have proven successful there, including developing a strategic plan.

### *Advance Contacts*

Barry had in-person or telephone conversations in advance of the visit with:

- Rev. Vanessa Southern, Minister
- Rev. Nicole Kirk, Acting Assistant Minister
- Tony Obst, AGC Committee and Point of Contact for the Assessment
- Andrea Lerner, District Executive, Metro New York District

Barry received and reviewed substantial material, including information on finances, membership, programs, staffing, recent annual reports, newsletters, and the church web site.

### *Historical Perspective*

UCS dates its founding to 1908, when seventeen charter members formed the Unitarian Church in Summit. Quoting from the UCS web site:

From our start over 100 years ago, The Unitarian Church in Summit has valued the role of ministers who challenge us morally, intellectually and spiritually. Inspiring music and strong programs for children have also been part of our tradition for decades. Our church building combines an elegant and intimate sanctuary that dates back to 1913 with modern classroom and meeting spaces completed just a few years ago.

The web site goes on to describe traditions of long and successful ministries, taking stands on sometimes unpopular issues, and continuing a commitment “...to promoting the good of humanity within this interconnected world,... [and] to sustaining our church as a significant influence in our region, our world, and our own lives.”

### *Visit Schedule and Process*

The schedule for the weekend is shown in Appendix A. Barry met with the Minister and staff, the Board, a group of past presidents, representatives of various committees, and a group working on planning for a strategic plan and potential capital campaign. He facilitated an open session attended by about 40 people. During the Friday and Saturday sessions, he met with a total of approximately 50 members. Barry offered brief remarks during both Sunday worship services (reproduced in Appendix B), and presented his oral report in a well-attended



open session following the second service. He then met with the Minister, Board, and AGC Committee to discuss the recommendations and next steps in more detail.

### ***Survey Results***

Thirty-six people completed a brief survey during the Saturday sessions. Appendix C contains the form, and Appendix D summarizes the results.

When asked about defining milestones, over 80% of respondents (30 of 36) noted the major building renovation and consolidation that was done in 2000 and 2001, most mentioning the importance of bringing the “two congregations” (children’s religious education and adult programming) under one roof. Other noted milestones were: calling Rev. Southern; the recent emergence of social action programs; and the Church’s history of attracting excellent and renowned ministers, such as Jacob Trapp, A Powell Davies, David Bumbaugh, and its present minister. People noted the difficult period of rapid ministerial transitions following the long ministry of Rev. Trapp.

When asked about growth, 24 of 25 respondents indicated a preference to grow, although others declined to answer or indicated that numerical growth is unimportant to them but may be a consequence of excellence. The survey responses generally favoring growth were consistent with what I heard during the weekend.

Strengths most frequently cited were: the diverse talents and commitment of the membership; strong lay and professional leadership; excellent ministry, religious education and youth programming, social action, and music; and a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere.

The challenges most often cited were: inadequate space and facilities, and the challenges of maintenance; concerns about organizational structure and operations including communication, staffing, recruiting volunteer leaders, and ensuring optimal use of staff and volunteer efforts; finances, notably increasing annual giving to ensure funds for adequate staff and programs; member recruitment and engagement; and transitioning to a large church and managing growth while avoiding divisions and maintaining a sense of personal connections.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Commendations***

In my report on Sunday, I noted that UCS is a special congregation, recognized throughout the UU movement for its innovativeness, recent rapid growth, commitment to social justice, and overall excellence. You have been recognized as a Breakthrough Congregation, have been awarded a Social Justice Award for your work with the UUSC, and have been chosen as one of only eight Leap of Faith congregations – a reflection of the potential for UCS to jump to the next level.

Other strengths I noted are:



- Commitment to social action, working actively to promote positive change in the local community and around the world. Local efforts include serving as a host for a transitional homeless shelter, playing a leadership role in the New Jersey legislative ministry, and tutoring children in nearby urban areas. You are also engaged in global outreach, serving as a partner church. Your deep commitment to social action is reflected in investments in your physical facilities – installing showers and purchasing cots – to enable your role as a host church.
- Strong religious education and youth programming, with considerable commitment of professional staff resources. I was impressed that you offer Coming of Age and three levels of Our Whole Lives each year – a reflection of your commitment to families and youth.
- Excellence in ministry, programs, and staff. UCS takes pride in the ministers you have attracted over the years, including your current professional religious leaders. You recognize the importance of excellent staff as a way of empowering lay leaders and members, and you recognize that excellence in ministry is a joint responsibility of the professional staff, lay leadership, and membership.
- Stewardship and generosity – you are beginning to beef up your stewardship programs with this year’s introduction of one-on-one stewardship conversations for the annual campaign. You are a generous congregation, sharing the Sunday offering twelve times a year and contributing your fair share to the UUA Annual Program Fund and Metro New York District. Your approach of sharing the offering with a single organization for consecutive weeks is a novel way to build momentum and inspire increased generosity.
- Open to new ideas and initiatives, and able to mobilize the congregation to do substantial and exciting projects. I met members who noted they were empowered to initiate new programs and innovations; the Church encourages bottom-up ideas and action. At the same time, the leadership is able to marshal resources for large scale projects when the membership is fully on board. I was impressed with the ambitious, creative, and high quality building program you undertook 10 years ago to bring your congregation under one roof.

Overall, UCS has a tradition of excellence in all aspects of its ministry and programming, in addition to a prominent location, a beautiful, if too-small facility, and a commitment to sustaining a great legacy. Keep these strengths clearly in mind, as they form a solid foundation for moving forward in a way that will serve you well for the long haul.

### *Observations*

My sense is that UCS is poised to burst out in all directions and dimensions. Being among you for the weekend, it was easy to feel the excitement and energy, the strength and depth of



your programs, and the desire of most people to expand and grow -- to be able to reach more people who would benefit from your good news. The congregation feels squeezed by its current facilities, and your programs, budget, organizational infrastructure, and staff all seem scaled to your current physical space. You have plateaued at approximately 500 members, a common transition point in a congregation's history, and as noted above, a large majority of the members I met with would like to grow. You have taken some recent steps toward growth, notably adding a permanent assistant minister, and you recognize that a key next step is a comprehensive and compelling strategic plan that will galvanize and energize the congregation toward a shared and exciting future.

Successful stewardship is a function of commitment, engagement, broadly shared vision and sense of purpose, and available resources among the membership. You clearly have many of these ingredients – I observed a great deal of commitment and energy, and there's clearly significant financial resources here – as evidenced by your generosity for specific causes. What's needed to make this go is a compelling case – both for annual giving and for a future capital campaign. I heard about lack of support in budget deliberations for hiring a Chief Administrative Officer and for purchasing the property next door. Lack of support for such initiatives is most often due to a lack of a compelling case and broad understanding of what the congregation is trying to accomplish, and less to availability of resources or market conditions. A strategic plan linked to a compelling vision is the way to address this.

UCS's annual giving reflects the generosity of the membership and also indicates potential for greater equity in giving. Your average (mean) pledge is high relative to the rest of the denomination, but the distribution of your annual giving is skewed, with a small number of households providing a large share of the annual financial commitments (see basic data table above). This creates risks and also indicates sizable numbers of members who are not participating in the life of the congregation as fully as possible. As indicated in Appendix E, a more balanced distribution would be healthier.

A successful capital campaign depends on several key ingredients in addition to strong support for the project: solid and transparent finances; a culture of stewardship, generosity, and solid annual giving; an infrastructure to run a successful campaign; and established support processes that promote broad member engagement and communication.

### ***Recommendations***

I offer the following recommendations:

- ***Continue the conversation*** begun this weekend. Much of the value of the assessment visit is in the conversations among your members -- deep conversations about the enduring worth of UCS to all of you and to future members. Please continue these conversations on your own as they will help you clarify and articulate why each of you participates fully in the life of the congregation and gives generously. As part of the effort to keep the conversation going, encourage people to read this report.



- **Strengthen stewardship and annual giving** – continue to expand the one-on-one visits, enlisting more visiting stewards (captains) and reaching more members. Do a careful lessons learned analysis this year and build on this year’s progress. Start the planning for next year’s drive six months in advance, and engage consulting services earlier in the process. Expand the leadership team with more people to do specific jobs and manage the process more aggressively. Follow the process outlined in Beyond Fundraising, creating a program budget and compelling case for giving. Consider adopting the UUA suggested share giving guide to emphasize generous and equitable giving.
  
- **Strategic Planning** -- develop a complete strategic plan that starts with a broadly shared vision, mission, high level goals, and priorities; and then articulates specific strategic initiatives, along with necessary resources. Begin by adopting a methodology and schedule for developing the plan. I recommend that you choose a process that is both highly inclusive and rapid, so you can develop the plan quickly, ideally by the end of 2011. A rapid and engaging process will build momentum, confidence, and excitement throughout the congregation. Consider the following two sub-recommendations for strategic planning at UCS:
  - **Searching for the Future (SFTF)** – plan and carry out an intensive visioning weekend, involving a large number of members in the crucial big-picture work of defining a vision, mission, high level goals, and priorities. SFTF is highly effective for jump-starting the strategic planning work and fostering a strong sense of ownership of the resulting plan. See Appendix F for a detailed description. UCS is well-positioned to take full advantage of the SFTF process, as it will build on the best practices information you are gleaned from your Leap of Faith partner as well as your recent Sunday services about vision, building needs, and opportunities. Any planning process is most effective if participants have a sense of the possibilities.
  
  - Analyze and include critical **data** on your current situation and future goals in your strategic plan, and commit to measuring the effectiveness and success of your work. Collect baseline data on membership, attendance, visitor tracking, finances, and pledging. Develop five year projections, starting with two years of existing data. See Appendix G for a format. This will lay a foundation for identifying resource needs and making a mission-driven, compelling case for capital needs and increased annual giving.
  
- **Opportunities for Generosity** – As you develop a strategic plan and move toward a potential capital campaign, take the following actions to promote greater generosity among your members:
  - Formalize your **endowment** by explicitly documenting the purpose of the fund, adopting formal chartering and policy documents, and establishing a separate governance structure with elected trustees. There is much useful information on these topics in Beyond Fundraising, by Wayne Clark, and on the UUA web



site.

- Create an **active planned giving** program – once you have formalized the endowment, establish an active process to encourage people to make legacy and other gifts to the fund. Consider creating a special building fund to begin to solicit seed money for a future capital campaign.

## PROPOSED NEXT STEPS AND CONSULTING SUPPORT

I would be honored to continue to assist UCS in strengthening stewardship, strategic planning, and an eventual capital campaign. The table below summarizes recommended next steps along with specific opportunities for and costs of continued consulting support.

Major Activity	Tasks and Schedule	Consulting Time and Cost
2012 Annual Giving Campaign (AGC)	Fall 2011 for planning, organizing, recruiting, communicating Winter/Spring 2012 for AGC execution and to conduct orientation (training) sessions for visiting stewards (captains)	Total of 2-3 days, including phone and email support and 2-3 visits Cost = \$2,860 - \$4,290
Searching for the Future (SFTF)	Tailored, intensive weekend to galvanize the congregation around a vision, mission, and high level goals and priorities. Possible late Spring or early Fall 2011.	Total of 3 days Cost = \$4,290
Strategic Planning	Create a steering committee and task forces to flesh out the plan, building on SFTF results Follow-on support for development of a Strategic Plan	Total of 1 day for regular status checks and ongoing support Cost = \$1,430

UUA consulting fees are \$1,430 per day which is all-inclusive of labor and expenses. We charge only for time worked and for time spent one-way in transit, which also covers prep time and review of materials. I would work with you along the way to manage your costs so you get the greatest value – and would give you options along the way.

## CLOSING



I thoroughly enjoyed my time with you during the Assessment Weekend and AGC orientation session. UCS is a wonderful congregation with great potential to grow into a major force for Unitarian Universalism. I feel blessed to be a part of your process of strengthening your stewardship and clarifying your mission and strategic goals.

Faithfully submitted,

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Dr. Wayne Clark, Director, UUA Congregational Stewardship Services  
Andrea Lerner, DE, Metro New York District



**Appendix A – Assessment Visit Schedule  
 Unitarian Church in Summit  
 April 1-3, 2011**

<b>Friday Evening</b> 3:30 – 4:00 PM 4:00 – 5:00 5:30 – 6:30 6:30 – 8:00	Meet with Rev. Vanessa Southern; facility tour Meet with Staff Meeting on potential capital campaign and strategic planning Informal reception with Minister, Board members, Annual Giving Campaign (AGC) Committee, other congregational leaders
<b>Saturday</b> 8:30 – 9:15 AM 9:30 – 10:15 10:30 – 11:15 11:30 – 12:15	Past presidents Finance Leadership Programs
12:20 to 1:20 PM	Working lunch with the Board, Minister, and AGC Committee
1:30 - 3:00	Open facilitated workshop for congregational leaders and other interested congregants.
<b>Sunday</b>	
9:00 and 10:45 AM	Attend both worship services and offer mini-sermon (Appendix B)
12:00 – 1:00 PM	Town Hall Meeting to present Assessment findings and recommendations.
Following open forum 1:15-2:30	Meet with Board, Minister, and AGC Committee to answer any remaining questions and to provide more specific, next-step recommendations.
2:30 PM	End of the assessment visit



## APPENDIX B

### **Stewardship as Spiritual Discipline A Mini-Sermon by Barry Finkelstein UUA Congregational Stewardship Consultant**

I am one of the crazy ones – the people who sign up to do stewardship in our churches. Go around and talk to people about money. Both in my own congregations and as one of the Unitarian Universalist Association’s congregational stewardship consultants. Which is how I come to be among you this weekend.

When I ask myself why I do this, an image pops immediately into my mind. An image of one of my former churches – South Church Unitarian Universalist – in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. We’re in the sanctuary – a beautiful historic sanctuary inside a granite monument of a building – and it’s January 1 2008, a Tuesday. On what might have been an ordinary New Year’s Day, the church is filled with people, with energy, with magic. A beautiful, powerful magic that changed the world.

You see, New Hampshire had just enacted a Civil Union Law, the culmination of years of activism and courage, to provide legal recognition to the committed relationships of gay and lesbian couples. South Church conducted about a dozen civil unions that day, and celebrated with a special worship service in a nearly full sanctuary. I was relatively new to New Hampshire so could take no direct credit for the civil union law. But we – all of us UUUs are part of a long chain of people -- and commitment -- and passion -- and radical love -- that made it possible. And of course, people sitting in our pews that day were among those who really made it happen.

I could not have been more proud.

My minister wife, Roberta, often says that the purpose of the church is to save lives and change the world. And on January 1, 2008, we celebrated the fruits of the work that did both of those things. Our long tradition of welcoming gays and lesbians to join our congregations and worship among us in safety and love has surely saved lives. And pushing our society to embrace tolerance and justice and equality for all, changes the world.

I have come to see that our congregations and our movement working together are **powerful** – a force for good. Too often we convince ourselves otherwise – buying into the notion that we are a tiny minority with few resources and little influence – a scarcity myth. But in my heart I know different. And I believe that you know different too. By working together, believing in our power, exercising that power, we can change the world.

But power requires resources – people, energy, money – what I have come to see as a ministry of stewardship. I thought I should offer you a definition of stewardship. So I headed straight to that ancient source of wisdom -- Wikipedia – and found these words – stewardship is “a responsibility to take care of something one does not own.” This brought to mind the words of



Ginny Courter, the moderator of our Unitarian Universalist Association, who said that the purpose of the church is to serve those not yet here – those we don't yet know and can scarcely imagine, both in our own time and as a legacy for future generations – much as visionaries here in Emerson did when buying this property, moving to full-time ministry, and taking other leaps of faith.

Stewardship is the way we marshal our resources to do the life-saving work of the church – here and now, and as an investment in the future -- to serve those not yet among us.

I know you have great dreams for this congregation – a growing, thriving, liberal religious community that is a force for life and love in Summit and well beyond. And I know that you can achieve these dreams by coming together as a community to do the spiritual work of stewardship. Please join us for lunch at noon to hear my report on the state of stewardship at your congregation.

I leave you with these words by architect and city planner Daniel Burnham. “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir the blood and probably will not be realized. Make big plans. Aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical structure, once erected, will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing. Remember that our children and grandchildren are going to do things that would stagger us. So, make no little plans.” Amen.



## Appendix C

# Assessment Visit Survey

1. What are three defining milestones or events in this congregation's history?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please complete the following sentence by circling one option below: Over the next five years, I would like to see our membership experience the following annual growth rate:

1. no numerical growth.
2. 5 percent annual increase in membership.
3. 10 percent annual increase in membership.
4. 15 percent annual increase in membership.
5. greater than 15% annual increase in membership.

3. What are the three greatest strengths of this congregation?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are the three most important challenges this congregation needs to address in the next five years?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D Unitarian Church in Summit, NJ Survey Results April 1-3, 2011 Assessment Visit (36 Respondents)

### 1. Milestones

Most often mentioned were:

- Building renovation and consolidation under one roof – 2000/2001
- Calling Rev. Vanessa Southern as the current minister
- Attracting great ministers and ministerial transitions – A. Powell Davies, David Bumbaugh, Jacob Trapp. People noted the difficulty finding a long-term minister after the retirement of Jacob Trapp
- Recent emergence/surge of Social Action – human toll of war memorial ribbons; Millennium campaign, centennial; public stand against war in Viet Nam; decision to become more involved in local causes; giving away the plate; peace site; HomeFirst
- Recent strength of the RE Program and Youth Program

### 2. Growth Preference (Annual)

Response	Number
No numerical growth	1
5% annual increase	9
10% annual increase	7
15% annual increase	1
Greater than 15% increase	7
Other (range 5-10, 10-15), Not really important to me	5
No Answer	6

### 3. Strengths

Most often mentioned were:

- Active, committed membership with diverse talents
- Excellent, charismatic minister and other professional staff
- Religious education and youth programming; success attracting young families with children
- Liberal commitment to social action, significant voice for liberal religion
- Music program
- Inclusive, welcoming congregation



#### 4. Challenges

Most often mentioned were:

- Space needs – both long term/strategic, and upkeep of current facilities
- Organization and operations – determining and funding sufficient staff, optimize staff performance, organizing for growth, enabling volunteers
- Finances and generosity
- Strategic plan focused on long term goals in the context of a shared vision
- Membership program – recruiting, orientation, engagement, filling volunteer positions
- Managing the transition to a large church



## Appendix E Quartile Analysis

### Distribution of Financial Commitments

Creating a quartile analysis of annual financial commitments (pledges) is one of many tools to help determine the fiscal health of your congregation. The analysis is best used as a guide, not a prescription.

To create a quartile analysis, arrange all of the commitments in descending order, from largest to smallest. Divide the total commitments into four equal parts. Refer to Chart 1 for the following example. If the total commitments are \$250,000, there will be four equal quartiles of \$62,500 each. Let's assume that there are 200 total donor households (pledge units). To determine the first quartile of giving, add the largest commitment to the next largest and continue until you reach 25 percent of the total commitments (\$62,500 in this example). Continue down the list of commitments until the total reaches 50 percent (\$125,000) to determine the second quartile of giving. Follow the same procedure to determine the third and fourth quartiles of giving.

**Chart 1  
 Relatively Healthy Distribution**

<b>Quartile Analysis</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> quartile	20 households (10% of total donors) contribute the first 25%	\$62,500
2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile	30 households (15% of total donors) contribute the second 25%	\$62,500
3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile	70 households (35% of total donors) contribute the third 25%	\$62,500
4 <sup>th</sup> quartile	80 households (40% of total donors) contribute the final 25%	<u>\$62,500</u>
	200                      100%	<u>\$250,000</u>

This example represents a relatively healthy distribution of financial commitments because the financial burden is shared fairly well among all of the donors. It is quite likely that many donors in this congregation are making an equal sacrifice, and contributing their fair share. The average commitment from donors in each quartile looks like this:

1 <sup>st</sup> quartile average commitment	$\$62,500 \div 20 = \$3,125$
2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile average commitment	$\$62,500 \div 30 = \$2,083$
3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile average commitment	$\$62,500 \div 70 = \$893$
4 <sup>th</sup> quartile average commitment	$\$62,500 \div 80 = \$781$

*Note: For reference purposes, we believe that the current average financial commitment among Unitarian Universalist donor households is about \$1,500. We believe that the current median commitment is about \$1,200.*



## APPENDIX F

### SEARCHING FOR THE FUTURE

*Searching for the Future* is a weekend program of small group workshops designed to help a congregation clarify its vision and mission, and develop a starter list of goals that can later be incorporated into a strategic plan. It is highly participative, and should include as many members of the congregation as possible. The workshops are lively, making the process of clarifying vision and mission not only painless, but actually fun. The process is tailored to the specific needs and starting point of each congregation.

Volunteer facilitators meet on Friday evening with the consultant to go through the process of articulating a vision, creating a draft mission statement, and brainstorming goals and priorities in support of the mission. On Saturday, these facilitators lead several small groups of church members to go through the same process. Late Saturday or Sunday, the facilitators meet again with the consultant for a wrap-up session to blend the draft vision and mission statements into one statement, which is sent to the congregation for adoption. The facilitators and consultant also analyze and consolidate the brainstormed goals and priorities for use by a strategic planning task force in the formulation of a five-year strategic plan. The goals portion of the weekend can be focused on the specific needs of each situation – for example, they can be used to support a case statement for a capital campaign.

SFTF is based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a method of organizational planning that builds on strengths and successes. While the AI approach does enable an organization to work on issues and challenges, the process emphasizes the positives. Beginning with what is going well enables an organization to do more things well in the future.

The following definitions are used throughout *Searching For the Future*.

- **Vision:** A mental image of the organization in an ideal future state.
- **Mission Statement:** A concise, powerful, and moving description of the ministry of the organization, its reason for being, and its place in the world.
- **Goals:** Identified themes to be undertaken in support of the vision and mission.
- **Activities:** Specific projects, with measurable outcomes that support the vision, mission and goals of the organization.



## Preparation

### *Promotion*

Good attendance is essential to give validity to the process and build momentum. To that end, publicity and promotion activities are crucial. Here are some thoughts and examples to consider:

- The lay leaders and professional staff must understand the purpose of the weekend and they must be openly committed to it. They must be willing to share that support with the rest of the organization. The minister(s) are encouraged to attend the Friday session and serve as cheerleaders.
- Begin promoting the weekend two months in advance, or as soon as possible.
- Be clear about the participatory nature of the process.
- Be clear about the time commitment. The facilitators devote three hours on Friday evening, three and a half hours on Saturday (morning or afternoon session), and two and a half hours on Saturday afternoon/evening or Sunday afternoon for a total of nine hours. The participants commit three hours on Saturday.
- Focus on the future. Many people have attended something similar (at least in their minds) that turned into a rehash of past events, particularly perceived failures. They fear that SFTF will turn into just another unsatisfactory experience. Make it clear that while we will acknowledge and build on the history, the focus will be on the future of this organization.
- Use testimonials from other organizations about SFTF.
- Use the newsletter and the Sunday bulletin for announcements. Encourage the leaders to be creative. One organization created a list of the top ten reasons to participate.
- Supplement the announcements with a telephone tree to personalize the invitation.
- Use email lists to invite members of the organization.
- Post a notice about the SFTF on your web site with a link to sign up.
- Ask members of the governing body and other relevant committees to promote SFTF during coffee hours, and have a registration table available.
- Include time for food and fellowship before each session. Morning sessions might offer coffee, juice, and muffins. Soft drinks, crackers, cheese, and fruit can be available at afternoon sessions. If evening sessions are scheduled, soup, finger sandwiches and non-alcoholic beverages can be provided.
- Provide childcare and transportation when needed.
- Equip each session with newsprint, markers, 3x5 note cards, and masking tape (that will not remove paint from the wall).

### *Facilitators*

- Facilitators are participants during the Friday session, process leaders during the Saturday sessions, and participants in the wrap-up session.
- It is best to have two facilitators for each session, so they can divide the role of moderator and scribe, and support break-out groups.



- Facilitators can be recruited from among acknowledged leaders of the organization who are passionate about the organization. Facilitators should be comfortable leading groups and must have the ability to facilitate without offering visioning suggestions. They are responsible for the process, not the content developed during the session they are leading – they have had their chance to be participants during the Friday session.

### ***Sign-up Process***

Wide-spread participation is a key to success. Extensive publicity helps make the congregation aware of the process. They need to fully understand the process including their willingness to contribute 3 hours of their time. The more that people participate, the greater will be the degree of ownership of the mission statement and the goals that are generated by the weekend process.

Members should be able to call the church office or a designated member to register to attend a particular session. In addition, personal phone calls and emails can be made to members and friends in the two weeks before *Searching for the Future* to clarify which session they wish to attend. These phone calls can also determine whether childcare is needed. Direct, personal invitations often dramatically affect the level of participation.

Shortly before the weekend, the names of those attending can be sorted into groups of 8-12 participants and assigned to specific facilitators. This process will help to determine how many facilitators will be needed for each time period. Groups work well when they represent the diversity of the congregation (age, gender, belief systems, etc.). It is suggested that family members be separated into different groups and youth be encouraged to participate.

On the Saturday of the *Searching for the Future* weekend, it will be necessary to have an on-site coordinator to welcome the participants and direct them to their rooms. Inevitably, there will be people expected but not showing up, and others showing up unexpectedly and so there will need to be someone doing last minute changes to the groups.

Keep track of the numbers of those attending, so that you can report the numbers to the congregation afterwards.

For more information, contact: Barry Finkelstein, UUA Congregational Stewardship Consultant, at [barrypf@gmail.com](mailto:barrypf@gmail.com), 703-407-5457.



**APPENDIX G  
 BENCHMARKS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING**

	Year-2	Year-1	Current	Year+1	Year+2	Year+3	Year+4	Year+5
# Members								
# Donor Households								
Average Annual Financial Commitment (Pledge)								
Total Income From Financial Commitments								
Other Income (Itemize)								
Total Annual Operating Budget								
Average Sunday Attendance								
Re Enrollment								
Average Re Attendance								
# Classrooms Needed								
Staffing -- Number								
Staffing -- Expense								