RETREAT NOTES

United Church of Northfield

January 28, 2023, 9:30 AM

**Present:** Peter Evans, Debbie Maloney Evans, Laura Ranker, Judy Howard, Lauren Howard, Mary McDaniel, John Knox, Bev Knox, Greg Lombard, Lorinda Dezotell, Karen Taylor, Dexter Rowe, Bonnie Gayle, Rev. Julie Lombard, and Harriet Hirst (note taker)

Peter welcomed everyone and Julie offered a prayer.

In reviewing the agenda, Peter would like us to be thinking about who we are as a church and how we serve others through our supporting ministry. What about our statement still rings true? What has changed since writing this? What is our work in serving others moving forward? Break out into three groups – document in bullet form when answering questions.

GROUP #1 – Take a look at WORSHIP (Peter, Laura, Judy, Bonnie, and Lorinda):

* We are predominantly UCC with some UUA still having the same roots and in process of integrating more UA elements into worship.
* Still embrace the seven UUA principals but may make changes.
* Still feel we are one congregation although fractions within differ; in a positive note, we have a lot of diversity in church and come together as one.
* Still see Jesus as central figure in church – typical Sunday basically the same order of service but covid related.
* Coffee hour important part of church and is coming back since covid.
* Continue with special services – Good Friday, Christmas Eve, etc. slowly getting back to that.
* Would like to see Maundy Thursday come back and dinner with Methodist.

Changes – worship since writing Our Story:

* Incorporated new UUA elements into the service.
* Introduced a new UUA hymnal.
* Order of service has been flexible.
* Lack of children – times have changed.
* Children’s service now a “time for all ages” message – more general.
* Congregational needs vs. ministerial independence vs. following framework; still trying to find a balance between UCC and UUA message – some tension about balance and continue to work on this.
* New ways to do family ministry – outdated now.
* No children – families attend regularly.

Worship – moving forward:

* Operated in silos in various levels in terms of worship - need to find a balance with deacons supporting pastor and pastor providing worship in own vision.
* Continue UUA or UUC order of service to come together.
* Find ways to engage parents that is more convenient for working families vs. retirement community – provide opportunities and children will follow.
* Engage older kids – create a café style meal as way of getting relationship with older kids to plant a seed.
* Now deacons and Julie started idea of having a UU service both good and not so good – may separate folks, so may have problems – more to flush out. We have two rich traditions and may find ways to come together as one congregation in a unique hybrid way.
* Time for children when we have more children important. Build activities outside of worship.
* Identify new ways to be religious – if less focus on religion maybe how to be a good person.
* More community engagement – World Café with NU students from different parts of the world and community members coming together – travel to food bank, etc.

GROUP #2 – SUPPORTING MINISTRY (Mary, Lauren, Greg, Debbie, and Karen)

* What about the ministry still rings true? Most of it seriously impacted by covid.

What changed and work moving forward.

* Covid seriously impacted socialization, belonging to different groups – coming out of it ministries were now calling parents; need food delivered, need calls ; reception ministry more and more need that supports events: weddings, funerals assign food; coffee house twice a year event brought in a lot of community – lots of fun, community connections and entertainment; Services at the Mayo nursing home hardest places during covid – they are so hungry for that connection with others when going forward – team went to Mayo and hymns sung, prayers, stories, communion, etc.
* Community dinners discussed and will be working with Methodist.
* What has changed – we went to a couple of kids to no kids; new things with a few new faces.
* Work going forward: we have zoom options a real plus to bring word, music and service and will continue with those options; offers more recruitment opportunities.
* Bring in families with children will be challenging as the family work schedule requires that everything to do on the weekend.
* More social opportunities: Potlucks, childcare, book groups, Read to Win, potlucks with entertainment, dinner theater. Put potluck sign out for the public.
* Greater use of Howe’s Hall – advertising its use through channel 7, web and Facebook. Advertise to make it known this is here and to get in touch with Laura.
* Newcomers welcome with information and/or potluck.
* Nerd choir to bring singing to Mayo.
* Mentor for reading at school for 1 hour to be more visible.
* Revive Mayo ministry provide music – “comfort choir” dedicated to people sick and/or dying or shut ins and sing for them.

GROUP #3 – MISSIONS – How we serve others (Julie, Harriet, Dex, John, and Bev Knox)

What is still true – some ministries survived the pandemic while others did not and are still returning.

* Working on reviving the community dinners with the Methodist, no Heifer- no children – TBD World Café and Nerd choir.

What has changed?

* Pandemic hit missions really hard.
* We had multiple leadership changes (flux) - and lay leadership level made lack of consistency difficult.
* Reconstruction to Howe’s Hall caused rental interruption – lost play group because of pandemic and community people went to the library, not here because they wanted it non-church.

What is our work in serving others moving forward?

* ENERGY - young blood needed and new faces.
* Priorities have changed – Sunday school model no longer works for families – thought process needs to shift – need to collect information; however, a tender topic and we don’t want to put people on the spot; need to reach out to our community and beyond.
  + Noted that we still need a program and nursery set up for children so families know they have a place they can go.
* Shared ministry with other partners: Episcopal and Methodist shared ministry, like community meals; pull resources – Christian ministry; broad level - use resources widely.
* Support current ministry; recovery ministry support; and new ministry - World Café, Nerd Choir need to support.
  + Noted that we need to get the ecumenical group back as there is not even a baccalaureate service.

Discussion followed about a possible collaboration (not merge) with other churches to pull resources for a shared ministry. John Knox has suggested at several other retreats that we talk to Mr. Vincent (Vince) Gauthier, businessman from Waitsfield who knows how to get things done.

* Suggestion made to invite Mr. Gauthier as a fifth Sunday speaker followed by a potluck.
  + Caution expressed that before we go out and share ministry, we need to get our own act together merging UCC and UUA.

Vacation Bible School discussed for summer Christian education. The needs have changed.

* Now schools have expanded the after-school program that competed with the summer school program.
* Bridges program started and would allow kids to come over for one block of time; now they are for a full day 9 to 5.

**Break for Lunch**

Started again at 12:51pm

Fund Raising assignments:

$3,000 to $5,000 GOAL

Brainstorming ideas were discussed.

Noted that Elizabeth Redmond offered to assist as over-coordinator.

Month of January to have no fund raisers to devote to Church’s internal work – time off.

February – Valentine’s Dinner/dance (next year 2024)

March – St. Patrick’s Dinner - DEBBIE

April – Church yard sale - LAURA

May – Plant Sale/concert (May 13) - DEBBIE

June - Strawberry Festival – LAURA

July – August – Summer Concert /ice cream– JON GAILMORE?

Labor Day – activity at church Corn Hole game – Community Yard Sale JULIE w/partners

October – Harvest Dinner

November – Soup Kitchen and silent auction - Judy & Lauren – Art Show- Peter?

December – Greens Fair/Wreath Making – Santa’s Village – JULIE w/partners & PETER.

Julie advised that for December celebration of Northfield on the Common – Sally Davis – needs music.

The meeting adjourned1:38am

Respectfully submitted,

Harriet Hirst, Note Taker