



**Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Assessment Visit
June 3-5, 2011**

Minister	None at this time	
Co-Presidents	Jeff Knapp and Jo Ann Thomas	
Contact	Jeff Knapp	
As of 9/30/2010:		
Membership	144	Number of Pledge Units: 112
RE Enrollment	43	
Annual Pledge Income	\$116,074 (2010-11)	Annual Budget: \$138,447
Average Pledge:	\$1,036	Median Pledge: \$504
Endowment	\$31,000	
Total Reserved Funds	\$76,999	
Loans	\$76,979 (total)	
	Member Loans	\$30,276
	Chafee Estate Loan	\$ 9,004
	RE Building Loans	\$37,699

GRATITUDE

My thanks to Jeff Knapp for organizing this assessment visit. He did a masterful job tracking all of the details and preparing and gathering advanced materials. I am grateful for his gracious welcome and excellent care. Thanks also to the many leaders who prepared information and to all the congregants who gave so generously of their time to share their perspectives, ideas and caring for the fellowship.

This report reflects discussions with individual committee representatives, a phone conversation with the Acting District Executive Jeanelyse Doran Adams, members of the Board of Trustees and a workshop that was open to all. The workshop included representation from long term and newer members, from founders to families with young children, and even a few teens. I am grateful for their time and willingness to be open to this assessment.

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

HUUF is at a crossroads. At 58 years strong, many of the founding members have moved on with only a few remaining who have been coming for more than 50 years. Respect for the founders is great and the sense of loss for those no longer with you is felt in many ways. With more than half of the membership age 65 or older, the leadership recognizes the importance of envisioning their future in a way that embraces and respects their founders and reflects the needs of newer and future members.

Several themes emerged during this assessment:

- Transactional to Transformational
- Efficient to Effective
- Inclusive and Exclusive
- Family to Pastoral-size Membership



1. Transactional to Transformational: In many of the written materials and conversations so much was expressed in transactional terms. This includes things such as the need to have new members (to balance the budget) and how many committee members view their tasks (to get through the check list.) Some communications were difficult to discern as a fellowship from another type of social club. Transformational language is expressed in terms of the values and difference HUUF makes in people's lives and the community. For example, when looking at the website, there is a lot of practical and useful information about how to join, existing small groups, etc. It would be easy to add inspirational language found in the hymnal such as "Come, come whoever you are..." with a few sentences stating why someone would want to join such as to live in community with others who share liberal religious values and a passion to bring peace to your soul and the world.
2. Efficient to Effective: There are some big decisions and recommendations coming from surveys. Surveys are one example in which work is made more efficient. However, they provide one way communication and tend to quantify issues and opinions rather than to qualify them. Processes that result in a shared vision and generosity are messier, take longer and are more effective. This is because individual members can see themselves reflected in the outcomes and they have shared ownership in the success.

One example is the Program and Worship Committee which expressed how overwhelming it is to try to find meaningful worship 52 weeks a year. For them Sundays can be anything but rejuvenating and inspiring. The pressure of finding programs can go from searching for thought provoking and inspiring to doing what you can to fill a slot. Filling slots is efficient. Transforming worship is effective. Similarly, the board is focused on completing tasks rather than engaging a process for setting priorities.

3. Inclusive and Exclusive: There are some big things happening in small groups. Sometimes this is good and sometimes others can feel disenfranchised. While there is little or no formal adult RE, there are some small groups in existence that may not be open to all and some groups where many are unaware of their existence or their purpose. Not every group needs to be open to all however if there are some that are open to others or if all groups are closed, it can leave people who seek community in fellowship to feel left out. Additionally, there is an unintentional dichotomy that exists between young families and older generations. How this developed was unintentional. How to resolve it will come from intentional discussions and practiced solutions.
4. Family to Pastoral-size Membership: A family size congregation is characterized by fewer than 100 members and relies on volunteers to meet all of its needs. When a congregation is between 101-250 members, it is considered pastoral size. Because of the increased demands more congregants bring, it becomes increasingly more difficult to meet all of the congregation's needs with only volunteer labor for long periods of time. HUUF's membership is 144. You have begun to add part time staff with well thought out job descriptions, processes and selection criteria, newly established by the Personnel Committee. The new office manager has already brought relief from some volunteer duties and support to operations. The decision to hire a part time choir director has added greatly to the worship experience and brings inspiration to the sanctuary.



In Saturday's workshop, there was a discussion about envisioning a future of more people who hear about this fabulous denomination that welcomes them as they are and will make room for their truth even as it evolves. It was quickly followed with concerns about how you will be able to handle more people based on how things are being done now. When dreaming of the future, it is okay to also dream of a new way to consider and deploy resources. As is always the case, there are those who do not wish for the congregation to grow. While all voices are welcome and concerns are heard, some decisions will be and have been made that will displease some. One of the difficult transitions for a growing congregation is to go from consensus building to a more democratic process that calls the fifth UU principle to action. The bylaw that talks about consensus and quorums for voting is confusing and is an indicator of attempts to please all rather than a clear statement of how final decisions will be made.

Leaders noted that attendance at important fellowship meetings is low. Of 144 members, only about 40-50 actually attend important events such as the annual meeting, trustee elections, annual budget drive kick off, and the service auction fundraiser. This makes it difficult to build community and develop critical mass when choosing directions to move forward. When congregations grow, it is often easier to assume that someone else has taken care of whatever is needed or that one's vote is not important. This concern could easily be listed under efficient/effective, transactional/transformational and inclusive/exclusive. Personal responsibility for being in community remains regardless of size. It was noted that many congregants are aging and find it more difficult to attend, however, this alone does not account for the low turnout.

Preparing for a Consulting Minister

The Ministerial Search Task Force was developed by the board in response to a survey taken two years ago, and is consistent with reasons still before the fellowship. The energy and relief such a person will bring to the fellowship will be felt on many levels. Concern was expressed about being able to afford the expense of a minister long term. The question could easily be one of whether the fellowship can afford to continue without this resource. The consulting minister's salary will be subsidized in each of two years with designated funds, some reserve funds and collecting on verbal promises made to increase giving once the appointment is made. The finance committee's recommendation for subsidizing these initial years is a sound one. Please see recommendations for planning beyond the consulting minister's term in the recommendations section.

The consulting minister will spend two years helping to build on the worship experience and working with the congregation and board to prepare for a called minister. While there, the minister can help the fellowship be inspired and challenged to live out your UU values more fully lending support to a weary Program and Worship Committee.

Administration and Staff

The personnel committee is creating a professional and legally compliant set of policies to guide hiring and managing. The office administrator, Shay, brings a wealth of energy and know how to operations and is ready to serve even more fully. Systems are slowly becoming more centralized and available through a secure server. This will add for greater accountability and access to information. The process appears to be well thought out and inclusive of best



practices. Shay is doing a good job of promoting the venue to build revenues. She has an excellent plan and is developing attractive materials. A healthy congregational budget receives a minimum of eighty percent of its revenue from member pledges and has other revenue streams. Allowing your building to work for you is an excellent strategy and HUUF is a beautiful venue to promote.

Investing in the music program with a part time choir director has brought great energy to the services. This serves as an example of how once you experience the difference it is easier to gain the financial support to retain it (transformational). The program is expanding to be more of a full music program. In its growth, it is important for the director to work within the annual budget constraints unless permission from the board is given.

The part time DRE is engaged in and excited by her work. She has plenty of energy and ideas and is in need of more volunteers to support the program.

Religious Education

There are a growing number of families arriving at HUUF and the RE program is blossoming. The Coming of Age program has been added and the youth group is up to twelve teens this year. Volunteers who participated in the assessment meeting offered important insights. A consistent committee of volunteers with working and over scheduled parents is difficult to establish. One of the committee's responsibilities is to contribute to the DRE's evaluation. Without this vital input this critical part of congregational life is vulnerable.

The children's RE program is folded into the operating budget and is requiring more resources. There is no additional registration fee to participate in RE classes. Sunday attendance by families is sporadic and many families have yet to become members or pledging households.

Welcoming newcomers is an important part of being a fellowship and a denomination. Welcoming families requires extra attention to what brings them to your door. Introducing families with young children into the congregation can sometimes feel a little chaotic to others. Some families who experience the uneasiness do not return.

Social Justice

Social justice has a methodical approach to engaging the congregation and the community. There are opportunities to support both local and global organizations with financial support. Opportunities to serve with ones hands are provided through a tutoring program and cooking dinner for the homeless. Members of this committee have been a stable group with stable causes. In an ever changing world, new causes and new ways to address them are also important. Newer or younger members who have joined do not stay because "there is no room for new ideas."

Building

There is a five year building plan that is prioritized and includes immediate needs, practical ongoing/upcoming maintenance needs and desired projects. Estimated costs are also noted. The desired items are things that the fellowship has discussed but are not a part of a vision for the role of the building in the future.



The fellowship is located on a beautiful lot with plenty of room to grow. There is a sewage system that limits development of portions of the property but there is still ample space for expansion. There is a garden, a children’s play area, a beautiful memorial garden and an outdoor deck/patio.

Several years ago the RE wing was added. There are four classrooms sectioned off for grade clusters, a room for babies and toddlers, and a teen room which this year is joyfully filled with twelve teens. There was no formal campaign to build the wing. To fund it, a few members made a few gifts and several more made loans in addition to what was borrowed from the bank. Loans are being paid back in a timely fashion.

Money Matters

The annual budget drive results for 2010-11:

Quartile	# pledge units	Total \$ pledged	% of total	Ideal
1 st	6	\$32,000	5.4	10
2 nd	11	\$29,720	9.8	15
3 rd	22	\$28,280	19.6	35
4 th	73	\$26,74	65.2	40
Total	112	\$116,074	100	100

Average Gift: \$1,036

Median Gift: \$ 540

There are two areas regarding the annual pledges for the fellowship’s attention. The first is the heavy reliance for half of the annual pledges on 17 households, the majority of which are over age 65. The second is the large gap between the average gift and the median gift. The closer these numbers are the more evenly distributed the responsibility for the budget is between the upper and lower quartiles. Ideally these numbers would be a difference of a few hundred dollars. For HUUF the gap is nearly double the median gift.

Membership attrition rates are something to look at as well. While visitors are arriving every Sunday and some join, many founders are moving on, many having passed away. Remembering that new members need time to grow their generosity as they find the value of the congregation in their life, those who have already done so are those who are also leaving. Keeping the attrition rate in mind will keep the sense of growing grounded in reality and keep plans realistic. This also underscores the need to step up the path to membership with strategies that “repel fewer visitors” as outlined in “Ideas for Growth” from Golden, CO.

Often, stewardship consulting is requested because the annual budget drive did not make goal, possibly for several years. For many, the reason they give is because they want a good sermon and/ to access religious education for their children. These are examples of transactional giving. For others, giving is a joyful act that ensures this community is here for them, to be with like-minded people who share their values. This is transformational giving. Budgetary needs are not motivating for either group. To inspire generosity people like to experience and recall the impact of giving.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Please share this report with everyone in the fellowship. Post it on your website, e mail it, and print out copies for those who prefer. Keep a copy within easy access in the church office. Ask everyone to read it and invite discussion.

1. **Inspiring Generosity:** “May what you bring to the table be almost as important as what happens there. Here may you find what you need and may what you offer be accepted.”

In a culture of generosity everything begins and ends with gratitude. Be open to the unexpected gifts each brings to the table. How each challenge is viewed is also important to creating generous congregations. For example, rather than looking at a situation as fixing a problem try searching for the possibilities; from so much to do to what can we realistically do and do well. Rather than determining what others ought to be doing take time to ask them “what is your bliss and what skills do you have that you are willing to share with us?” Listen.

Some ways to consider many of the issues being discussed might be viewed like this: how can we share the saving message that is uniquely Unitarian Universalist? How do we make families feel welcome in the sanctuary? How do we intentionally reach out to understand other perspectives? How can we share this space together in a meaningful way? Am I remembering to say thank you and to value others?

Here are some more specific recommendations.

- People at HUUF treat each other kindly and many discussions are focused on practical issues and practical solutions. As you decide to enter into less efficient and messier processes, consider how you might create gracious space. Creating gracious space requires intentionally setting out to listen and make room for other voices. (See book reference below.) Leading with the mission will remind you to be there for each other and welcome all who seek sanctuary and a place to grow their souls with thoughtfulness and free from judgment. It will gradually evolve to joyful giving of one’s time, talent and treasure. Heads follow hearts, resources follow mission.

Generosity is the result of a relationship that goes beyond meeting budgetary needs. It engages individuals’ passions and desires and aligns with their values. It comes from the heart first and practical considerations second. It comes from all the messiness that happens in any meaningful, long term relationship. The processes that allow for discourse and discussion are those that result in give and take to meet on common ground and a shared vision for your future together. As these kinds of discussions are allowed and the budget is seen as a resource and not the primary decision making tool, generosity will build.

- Consider adding more greeters from the parking lot to the door and even in the foyer. A diverse group of greeters that includes families with young children, GBLT members as well as the older generations will add to the welcoming experience and share the work of



growing the congregation. Being a greeter can be a rotating role making it easier for people to say yes and grow their own relationships with visitors.

- Given how stretched volunteers are already, a face to face annual budget drive may be too difficult to do right now. However, opportunities to talk together about the future throughout the year may prove equally powerful. Consider organizing small cottage style meetings about meaningful worship and living UU values in the world and in the community. These meetings can be an opportunity to focus on value laden discussions and avoid fellowship business. Providing a few opportunities for people to participate in discussions on two different topics throughout the coming year would be enough to begin building gracious space and practice listening and receiving each other's gifts.
- Begin a formal planned giving program. Planned gifts are another wonderful way for people to support and show gratitude for the fellowship. Consider offering classes on estate planning, financial planning, household budgeting (this can also help people find ways to increase their annual commitment), and other related topics. Ask each person to consider naming the fellowship in their estate plans. Recognition such as a legacy honor roll of members who have made a bequest or other planned gift can also serve as an inspiration to others. Include those who have already done so or those who have indicated their intentions in their wills. There is often a perception that a bequest has to be large and is considered only for wealthy people. The truth is that anyone can leave a gift designation in their estate plans or wills and it is easy to do so. The board is encouraged to review their policies of the types of gifts that can be accepted such as cash, liquidated assets, stocks and bonds. Gifts of real property can require extensive management and may not be appropriate. The UUA has materials and a listserv on this topic (referenced below.)

2. **Membership:** Inherent in growth is change. Inherent in not growing is stagnation and eventually extinction, a less desirable form of change. Leaders have come across a valuable tool to help congregations promote membership with the "Ideas for Growth" DVD published by the Golden, CO congregation. While leadership is encouraged to limit the number of active committees (see recommendations below) they are encouraged to make the Membership Committee a priority. Beyond visitors and new members, this program also addresses member retention. A successful program will require many hands with diverse viewpoints. The work of the committee can be divided into smaller pieces so that not everyone who can help must make a huge commitment to meetings but rather smaller commitments to accomplishing specific tasks.

One of the best ways to retain new members is to help them become involved in ways that are meaningful for them. This includes making room at the table for new ideas and new ways of doing things. It is important for committee chairs, committee charters and committee functions to be assessed for how each is meeting the immediate and long term needs of the fellowship. The visioning process will help bring their relevance into alignment and allow for new ideas and approaches. This kind of review can be daunting to long term members but it is essential to healthy functioning and transformational growth.



The path to membership is the best place to set expectations for membership including a generous annual financial commitment. Most new members are expecting to be asked and by not having an open conversation they may get the idea that less, little or even nothing is okay. Using the fair share giving guide found in *Beyond Fundraising* by Wayne Clark helps members consider the appropriate level for themselves. Avoid talk of costs and budgetary needs. Instead, talk about the values and qualities for the community and what they can hope to find at HUUF. Similar language and discussions can also help current members when considering their annual commitment.

3. **Visioning Process:** Engage your hearts and dare to dream. You have received excellent counsel from the district and other UUA resources about the importance of having a shared vision. In everything the fellowship wishes to accomplish, it must first begin with a shared vision that answers the question “why.” Why is the community, world, and we as individuals better because we are here as UUs? Why will it be better five years from now?

A mission statement answers the question “what.” What are you today, here, in this time? It is a values laden statement that is just enough to encourage people to check you out (effective.) It does not answer all of their questions up front (efficient).

The two-year period with a consulting minister will provide much needed time to explore a “messier” vision and mission process followed by strategic planning that will guide the board, committees and individuals decisions about resource allocations. It will help all to live in the present with an eye on the future. Included in this report is a proposal for Searching For The Future (SFTF), a vision and mission setting process that leads to the congregation identifying the top goals for the coming years. SFTF is very similar to the process used in the day long Ministerial Day held a few years ago: Thoughtful, engaging and complete with positive outcomes. SFTF will have the best outcomes when the fellowship has had time to consider many possibilities and personal desires before the workshop. The new minister will be able to assist with this preparation.

4. **Leadership:** Leading during such challenging times will require a new way to consider your future. Leaders and others are encouraged to develop skills that will allow for more agile and intuitive leadership. Terasa Cooley, UUA Director of Congregational Life, has developed a workshop on Adaptive Leadership. There is also a book available via the UUA bookstore which is referenced below. The consultant has forwarded Terasa Cooley’s PowerPoint presentation to the board to sample the available information. Adaptive leadership is a practical understanding of how to help congregations think in new ways and identify the best leaders to help them realize their vision.
 - To help ease the load on the board and other leadership volunteers, strictly enforce the term limit bylaws for one person to serve as committee chair, add a limit on the number of consecutive terms a board member can serve, and recruit the annual budget drive chair from outside of the board. If there are people who can each take small parts of the budget drive, it will be easier for someone to agree to be the chair.



- Anyone from the fellowship who is attending General Assembly at the end of the month is encouraged to attend the two part sessions on the new FORTH program (Forward Through the Ages), a stewardship program that presents ways to introduce and support good stewardship in all areas of congregational life including the annual budget drive and planned giving. FORTH started as a pilot program and has been revised to do two things: help congregations build a broader understanding of stewardship and incorporate best practices that make for greater generosity. There are plenty of materials that allow a congregation to avail themselves to the program. You are also welcome to request guidance from a stewardship consultant.
- Consider adding a small amount funds to invest in one member annually to attend some form of leadership training that will benefit the fellowship.

The Board is encouraged to reduce the number of committees to a more manageable and realistic number focused on the priorities of the fellowship at this time. In doing so, volunteer resources can be deployed more strategically and with a greater sense of accomplishment. As committees are evaluated you may want to ask each to rewrite its charter beginning with each committee's theological reason for being. This can be a bit challenging while helping the congregation to speak in more inspirational terms. For example, most social organizations and non-profits have a finance committee and all are charged with being good stewards of the organization's fiscal resources. Why is it important that this exist in HUUF? As a values laden, religious organization, values laden statements underscore the significance of the fellowship and the values it espouses to the community.

5. **Capital Campaigns:** Capital campaigns are a great way to build stewardship of the fellowship and its assets. The process of an all fellowship capital campaign ensures that everyone has an opportunity to understand the importance of a project and to vote their support for it. Special campaigns provide an opportunity to come together and joyfully bring the fellowship's shared vision into being. Because the building is an important resource, the literal buy in is very important to one's relationship with the fellowship. It appears that the thinking at the time of adding the RE wing leaned toward being efficient (a practical look at the numbers and the quickest route to completion) versus the messier process of developing ownership (effective). As future needs for considerable giving come before the fellowship, you are encouraged to invite broad participation by all.

It is important to note that the use of membership loans is greatly discouraged by the UUA. Member loans can change a lender's relationship with the fellowship from spiritual to a business investment. Additionally, member loans are often seen as access to additional cash, often an amount above what the banks would lend. A good question to keep in mind is "if a bank would not lend us that amount, can we really afford it?" Finally, if the fellowship falls on hard times it may default and cause a member lender to be unpaid. If the member lender falls on hard times, the fellowship will have to return the money upon request and that may leave the fellowship in a vulnerable position.



- 6. Consulting Minister:** The decision to consult with a minister has been made and continued discussion to the contrary is not productive. It may be helpful to remember that the choices are not between a minister and staying as you are. Staying as you are will cause change in a different way; the fellowship numbers will dwindle and possibly lose its relevance in the lives of the members and the community. The choices are to be changed or to bring about desirable changes. A more positive question to ask is "What is our future and what investments must we make to bring it to fruition?"

This two year period is a time for each congregant to evaluate how he/she can increase their support annually to sustain a called minister. If it is determined that the fellowship wants to call a full time minister, then even larger personal pledge commitments will be necessary. The tendency is to somehow rely on unrealized new members, projecting a number and multiplying by the average gift. This can lead to a catch 22 situation because a minister is your best resource for helping a congregation to grow and, as stated earlier, new members will need time to grow their commitment and will require more staff to help minister to. The leadership may want to consider a special campaign to raise money to support the expense of calling a minister and funds that will allow the full cost of a minister's salary to be gradually added to the budget over two or three years.

It may be helpful to remind members that the fellowship belongs to the members. In HUUF's bylaws the decision making remains in the hands of the fellowship, not the minister. A fellowship sets the direction and a professional minister will help guide you there. The board is encouraged to communicate this important fact as often as necessary. It may be helpful to reach out to individuals who may be most concerned about this.

- 5. Religious Education:** The DRE and RE committee are encouraged to work with the district to discuss best practices regarding a registration fee and ways to encourage families to make weekly attendance a priority. Encourage families to help greet newcomers, especially those with children, so they know they are welcome in both the sanctuary and the classrooms as well as what to expect after services.

Consider looking for ways to have RE be offered at times before or after the service. In this way, children can participate in worship and become a regular, seen and contributing part of the fellowship. This could lessen the "us and them" feeling and add a richer experience for all.

Find ways for volunteers to participate that are manageable and do not require too many meetings. Consider inviting members without participating children to join the committee.



Unitarian Universalist Association

Congregational Stewardship Services

It has been a pleasure to work with you and to learn more about HUUF's history and future possibilities. You have a growing congregation on a beautiful site with a dedicated membership just waiting for the inspiration that will renew your souls and reenergize your commitment. What follows is a quote for the Searching for the Future process and a list of resource materials you may find useful. I hope I will have the opportunity to work with you again. If there are questions about the findings or recommendations, please pass them along to the co- presidents.

In faith,

Mary Gleason
UUA Stewardship Consultant

CC: Wayne Clark, Director of UUA Congregational Stewardship Services
Rev. Robert Latham, Interim Pacific Central District Executive



Resources

Heifetz, Ron, et al: *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*

Hughes, Patricia M: *Gracious Space: A practical guide for working better together*. The Center for Ethical Leadership. 2004 It is available at www.ethicalleadership.org/publications.

Mann, Alice: *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*. The Alban Institute. 1998

Rendle, Gilbert R: *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. The Alban Institute. 1998.

Wikstrom, Erik: *Serving with Grace: Lay Leadership as a Spiritual Practice*. Skinner House. 2010

www.UUA.org has dozens of listservs including leadership, money and endowments. As you look to expand systems and organize this is an opportunity to hear from other congregations how they have addressed the similar issues. You are also welcome to post a question and share what you have learned.

Searching for the Future Workshop Estimate

2 Days Preparation time

2.5 Days Workshop

6 hours of travel x 1 visit

(If necessary, a second trip could be added to help the board prepare.)

4.5 days (36 hours) plus 6 hours of travel = 42 hours or 5.25 days*

5.25 days x \$1320/day = \$6,930

*assumes all preparations can be done via phone and e mail.