

Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence (UFL), Kansas

Assessment Visit Report

[Note: Barry's complete report with several appendices is 20 pages in length. This is a 9-page condensation. Please contact the Fellowship if you'd like a copy of the complete report.]

To The Members and Friends of the Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence:

The Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence engaged Barry Finkelstein, a Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Congregational Stewardship Consultant, to conduct an Assessment Visit and prepare this report. The assessment focused on helping UFL address near and longer term fiscal issues, notably the uneven distribution of annual financial commitments (pledges) and the lack of reserves or endowment. **The findings and recommendations of the assessment are summarized in the following paragraphs and detailed further in the balance of the report.**

Findings

- UFL is a strong congregation with numerous strengths. You had great success in the past decade, intentionally following a long range planning process and accomplishing all of your strategic goals. You moved beyond the traditional fellowship model by supplementing your original offerings with a new spiritual service each Sunday, and you embraced professional ministry and religious education. You deepened your program offerings substantially and completed a highly successful capital campaign and building program. And you embraced these changes with enthusiasm and a strong sense of community.
- While you face financial challenges, as well as a desire to increase the breadth of engagement and commitment among your membership, you are poised to face these new challenges equally successfully.

Recommendations

- Continue to talk with one another about stewardship and the role money plays in enabling your grandest dreams. Continue the conversation begun during the assessment weekend.
- In the near-term, strengthen your annual budget drive process by incorporating some new approaches – one-on-one conversations and small group gatherings – to increase the depth and reach of stewardship conversations. The assessment weekend demonstrated your ability to conduct these conversations and engage with one another. Also, use some version of the UUA giving guide to communicate the concept of fair share giving.
- Take steps to shore up your finances for the longer term. Establish an endowment and planned giving program, and also develop long-term financial projections based on key assumptions about growth, member financial commitments, expenses, and reserves. Share

these projections openly to broaden understanding of UFL's finances.

Bring creativity to the processes of leadership and member development to encourage newer members to participate actively and fully.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

In holding up the mirror for your Congregation, Barry offered the following commendations – noting key strengths you can build on as you move forward.

- ***Boldness in embracing change and innovation*** – You have come far in the past decade, transforming your Fellowship into a full service, program-rich spiritual community. Moreover, you embraced change with a spirit of good will and compromise, accommodating diverse needs within the Congregation
- ***Strong sense of community*** – Your ability to embrace change and growth is due in good part to your strong sense of community. This sense of community came out loud and clear during my conversations with you and in your survey responses.
- ***Solid professional and lay leadership*** – You recognize the importance of professional leadership and dug deep financially to bring on excellent staff. You made an innovative job-sharing arrangement to be able to hire a part time administrative assistant and provide her with benefits. You also recognize the importance of solid lay leadership, and are moving toward a model of shared ministry and shared, collaborative leadership.
- ***Strong and exciting programming*** – You have much going on, during and beyond Sunday mornings. Your Sundays include rich spiritual services, adult Programs, and religious education (RE) for children and youth. Many people noted your strong RE programming which includes ambitious and wonderful programs like Our Whole Lives (OWL). Many people also mentioned the exciting Wednesday evening programs, along with social action initiatives and music. In short, there is a lot going on.
- ***Beautiful facility*** – You have built a beautiful and functional new building that complements your existing building and property very well. Moreover, you have demonstrated great communal commitment by conducting a rousingly successful capital campaign, driven by a strong sense of mission needs. Your Case Statement for the Campaign is very impressive and was obviously effective in inspiring generous giving.
- ***Stewardship progress*** – You are beginning to make progress toward effective and self-sustaining stewardship. This past year's annual budget drive produced excellent results, a solid increase over the prior year.

- **Generosity** – You have proven yourselves a generous community committed to practices of fair share giving to the Unitarian Universalist Association, fair compensation for your staff, and you are conscious about what it means to be a responsible employer.

Keep these strengths clearly in your consciousness, as they form a solid foundation for renewing your vision and mission, strengthening your stewardship, and growing and deepening as a community.

Observations

Barry offers the following observations:

- **Transition time** – You are continuing to absorb the major changes of the past decade even as you begin to plan for yet more change. As noted above, you are doing very well at absorbing the substantial changes – but also please recognize that change is stressful for individuals and the congregation. All indications are that you are of a size and activity level of a “program church” – and that is what most of you want – deep and rich programming of all sorts for all ages. Now you need to take some time to build up your infrastructure (governance, leadership, membership development) and financial resources to catch up with the depth and extent of the programming you have put in place. This is perfectly OK and a natural part of your organizational maturation process.
- **Staff and governance challenges** – While this was not a staffing study, in my experience you are probably understaffed for your size, activity level, and aspirations. In addition, UFL has reached a level of maturity that requires more organization in its governance structure. As discussed during the weekend, your leaders can not all be involved in all of the details of running the congregation. Creating more opportunities – more space -- will open the community to new leaders and will also position you for continued growth and deepening in your program offerings.
- **Highlights of survey results** – I encourage you to read over the survey results in Appendix C. The most frequently cited milestones or accomplishments were: the new building, calling your first minister, introducing the spiritual service, and re-founding the Fellowship and purchasing the property. The results to the question about growth indicate a very strong preference for continuing growth – only one person indicated a preference for no growth, and most people prefer to grow between 5 and 10 per cent per year. Many responses to question 4 indicate a concern about growth – wanting to be sensitive to the need to integrate new members and offer everyone compelling opportunities to bring their gifts and talents. There was also a concern about how to manage growth, ensure that UFL is staffed and organized for growth.

Strengths often centered around the people and richness of the UFL community – the diverse talents and optimistic spirit, the bonds among you, ability to deal with conflict, as well as tolerance and acceptance of diversity of thought and talents. People noted your dedicated and skilled lay and professional leadership, your shared liberal values, and your willingness to act on your values for social justice.

The challenges most often cited revolved around finances – for the annual operating budget today and for the future. Other challenges are staffing and organizing for growth, welcoming and integrating new members, creating opportunities for new leaders and preventing burnout in today’s leaders, addressing the physical space challenges especially for RE, and managing growth successfully.

Recommendations

Barry offers the following recommendations:

- ***Keep talking with one another about stewardship*** – the conversations that took place during the weekend were rich and wonderful – and people had no difficulty sharing deeply about their passions for UFL and why it deserves your generosity. Continuing these conversations will keep alive the spirit and energy of the weekend and will help you deepen your stewardship. A simple thing to do to keep the conversation alive is to circulate this assessment report, make it available on the web site, and discuss it in suitable forums. Ask questions about it, challenge one another.
- ***Finances (1 – short term): stewardship/annual budget drive.*** While you made progress in your most recent annual campaign, I believe you can do more to tap into the wells of generosity in your midst. The keys are reaching more people, and reaching everyone more directly, inviting everyone to share equitably in the financial support for UFL. I urge you to consider incorporating one-on-one stewardship conversations as they are the best mechanism for raising funds for the annual budget drive – and also for strengthening your community. We proved during the weekend that ***you can do these conversations.*** But I think you should ease into it, respecting the people who are uneasy about it. So I recommend you try a combination of techniques this year as a pilot, taking the following steps:
 - Conduct some one-on-one stewardship conversations with receptive people who agree to give this process a chance – perhaps you can cover 25% of the households this way
 - Convene small group gatherings to reach the remaining households – again appealing to people’s spirit of adventure to try something new for the community
 - Arrange for professional orientation and assistance for the participants – both the visiting stewards and the leaders of the small group gatherings
 - Adopt the UUA Giving Guide, or a tailored version, to communicate the values of shared and equitable giving, and to let people what might happen if the entire community were inspired to be as generous as possible. The beauty of the Guide is its reflection of UU values and its recognition that people can be fair share givers even at low levels – while inviting everyone to give as much as they can and wish
 - Develop a compelling case for giving to the annual budget drive, like the excellent case statement you did for the capital campaign. Include a program budget so people can see how their money furthers their mission priorities
 - Build in a budget line item for reserves and make funding it a priority

You have proven that you are able to do difficult things – like raise large sums of money for a capital campaign -- and that you are able to try new things – so I ask you to give this a fair try this and see how it goes.

- ***Finances (2 – longer term): long range financial projections and endowment*** – Develop a five or 7 year cash flow projection using the template in Appendix E (with the rows tailored as needed) to specify what it will take to be financially solvent. The projection clarifies unstated assumptions about how many members, pledging households, average annual financial commitment, etc. we might expect, and the impact of these assumptions on the finances. The chart can also be used to show the numbers of children in RE, how many classrooms are needed, etc., and so can aid in space planning. I also recommend that you create an endowment and planned giving program as a way to give people an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy for UFL. Check out the UUA web site for sample paperwork to do this. Once the endowment is in place, you can quickly begin encouraging people to participate.
- ***Leadership and member development*** – Your stewardship, energy, and continued growth will all be strengthened by engaging more people in leadership roles, encouraging them to deepen their commitment and participation. This requires intentionality. Look at how you identify, recruit, and develop potential leaders. Consider redefining jobs to make them more focused and time limited – task forces vs. committees, and specific clearly defined jobs rather than just asking people to serve on open-ended committees. Make sure that all work has a spiritual component. Recruit in a personal and direct way. Provide term limits for all positions to promote regular rotation and make clear your strong desire to involve new people. Ensure that your long time leaders do not micromanage so that new leaders are truly empowered. You are doing many things well and your growth is a testament to that. You have welcomed 15 new members this past year. Keep developing the membership process, creating a clear path to membership and deepening involvement. And be sure to ask new members to make a financial commitment (pledge) during the new member process – and use the giving guide so people will understand what a fair share pledge might be.
- ***Governance*** – As you work on leadership development, consider the function and role of your governing body and staff. At your size and activity level and surely as you grow, the role of the board will shift to one of policy setting and executive oversight, working through staff and committee/task force leaders to carry out specific initiatives. The good news in this is that it opens more opportunities for leadership roles and makes existing jobs more manageable and less subject to burnout.

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS AND CONSULTING SUPPORT

The following table summarizes the recommended next steps for UFL along with specific opportunities for and costs of continued consulting support. As we discussed, I recommend you engage the UUA for consulting assistance with the next steps in stewardship – strengthening the annual budget drive (ABD) for 2011. Ideally, you would do the planning for the 2011 campaign

in the Fall of 2010, so you are ready to execute the plans in the Winter and early Spring. I recommend one visit this Fall for the planning process, and a second in 2011 to help with campaign execution and to conduct orientation sessions for the visiting stewards and also for those who will run the small group gatherings.

Task	Schedule	Consulting Time and Cost
Planning for 2011 ABD. Assistance with such items as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining roles and recruiting an ABD team, visiting stewards, hosts • Development of a schedule and communication plan, including a web strategy • Developing a case, program budget • Continuation of the conversation about stewardship 	Late Fall 2010	1.5 Days, including one visit supplemented by phone and email consultation Cost: \$1,800*
Operational Support for 2011 ABD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing and finalizing publications • Consulting with task leaders • Preparation and conducting orientation sessions for visiting stewards and small group hosts and presenters • Event planning • Feedback session and evaluation at the end 	Winter/Spring 2011	2 Days, including one visit Cost: \$2,400*

It is probably wise to build in some additional time for work on longer range financial issues such as an endowment, financial planning, planned giving, and strategic planning. So the total might range from \$4,800 to \$5,200.

*Please note that UUA consulting fees are \$1,200 per day which is all-inclusive of labor and expenses. We charge only for time worked and for time spent one-way in transit (6 hours maximum), 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 am so impressed with UFL, with your dedicated leaders and with your commitment to the long-term viability and vitality of Unitarian Universalism in Kansas. You have done so much in the past decade and are now poised for a still more wonderful and dynamic future.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to work with you for the Assessment Visit, and I look forward to partnering with you as you continue to pursue your grandest dreams.

Faithfully submitted,

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Appendix C

Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence (UFL) Survey Results September 3-5, 2010 Assessment Visit (41 Respondents)

1. Milestones

Response	Number
Building new sanctuary through recent project, successful capital campaign	36
Calling a minister , first minister	25
Introduction of Spiritual Service , offering 2 different services each Sunday	12
Re-founding UUism in Lawrence in the 1950s, realizing we had what it takes	11
Purchasing the current property and school house, burning the mortgage early	11
Hiring DRE, Development of Professional RE Program	5
Hiring professional staff (minister and DRE)	4
Introduction of Wednesday night programming	4
Decision to grow in first 5-year plan	2
Recent growth in membership	
Removal of paneling in Founders Hall	
Starting OWL	
Change in the method for the pledge campaign	
Expanding membership/new member information and activities	

2. Growth Preference (Annual)

Response	Number
No numerical growth	1
5% annual increase	12
10% annual increase	14
15% annual increase	8
Greater than 15% increase	4
No Answer/Different Answer	2

3. Strengths

Response	Number
Shared liberal values and ideas, religious and social tolerance, openness, free-thinking, acceptance of diversity	18
The people – Enjoy, care about, and support each other; intelligent, good people, deep friendships, friendly, welcoming, intellectually engaged	16
Volunteerism and dedication -- Many people putting in more than their share of time and energy, devoted volunteers, commitment of core membership, dedication – staying for the long haul, generosity	13
Community , connection, friendships	12
Social justice , heart-felt, act on our values, work for a common goal, working together	7
DRE/RE innovations , Religious Exploration (RE), youth programming, commitment to children, OWL	6
Enthusiasm, initiative, can-do attitude	5
Willingness to try new programs, evolve, innovate	4
Minister	4
Strong leaders	4
Diversity of talents	4
Programs and innovations	3
Strong staff, top quality	2
Survival, longevity	2
Buildings and grounds, facility	2
Ability to deal with conflict, no hidden agendas	2
Wednesday nights	
Expanded opportunities provided by new space	
Pastoral care (new)	
Committee on ministry	
Everyone has a chance to be heard	
Good institutional memory	
Vision for the future	
OWL	
Growing energy with new members	
Sectarian outlook	
Our bright, creative, talented children	
Welcoming congregation	

4. Challenges

Response	Number
Balanced finances for the operating budget, support feasible financial growth, more money from more people, replace “cushion”, finance growth	30
Give more people opportunities to contribute their gifts; bring in younger, energetic members; find ways to tap into new members’ beliefs and interests, maintain dynamic organization attractive to new members, how to be more inclusive, retaining members, avoid burnout – balancing the old with the new	16
Manage growth , grow at a stable rate, increase membership, recognize that people don’t know each other all that well anymore	7
Space, RE wing , get a decent RE building	7
Staffing and infrastructure for growth, institutional change to professional leadership, coordination, move to full time ministry	7
Motivating volunteerism , including RE, volunteer coordinator	6
Endowment	6
Maintaining programs and physical premises, how to keep going, assuring meaningful programs for children and youth, how do we keep making RE better	5
Maintaining community, keeping the closeness, maintaining the “fellowship”	4
Leadership development, pipeline	3
Reduce contentiousness toward our leaders, decrease squabbling	2
Communication, information flux	2
Outreach – connecting to the wider community, greater community visibility	2
Learn to talk about \$\$	
More money for RE facilities and DRE	
Consolidating gains made over the past few years	
Accepting children	
Welcoming new people	
Developing a vision for the future	
Meeting small group needs of adults	
Cultural change to expand vision of member responsibilities	
Ethnic diversity	
Plan responsibly and not get carried away	
Retaining multigenerational character	
Inclusion of people with different views	