

Go simple Go Deep

This year we are committing ourselves to growth. I have to say it does make me a little nervous saying that. Because there is one kind of mindset that says growth is easy to measure either your numbers go up or they don't. So it is easy to measure but it is also easy to fail. Growth is kind of easy to mark - if you only think of growth as numbers - people in the pews souls in the building. And those numbers are important. But we know that growth is also about what kind of impact are we having, how are we seen and received out beyond these walls, whose lives are we changing - all of those things are growth too. But still ...

And you are seeing some things that are changing as a way of making room for growth. Last week we had our new full color logo on the front of the OOS This summer we upgraded our database to a program called Breeze. In the next couple of months we will be rolling it out for each member to have access to it. I am probably way too overenthusiastic about this. I am not really a database geek -but I know that this community having the ability to easily get phone numbers or emails of each other is a really important thing if we are going to grow. Being able to keep track of who is visiting and who is interested in joining - it is essential to growth. Making communication easier is essential to growth.

And of course we have Marty with us this year. Hiring an intern as a way of staffing for growth is great.

There are a lot of complex theories and plans for how a congregation should grow. Use more tech - get a band for the Sunday services, add alternate services, have potlucks lots of potlucks, be on Facebook and twitter and instagram all the time, make sure there is always something that folks want to come to, make a podcast, livestream your services, busy busy busy.

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Marty and I both read a book this summer entitled "Simple church" by Thomas Ranier. His basic point in the book, simply put is that churches tend to over program, They tend to have over complex mission and vision, and they tend to drift away from their mission and vision. In a white culture

that values busy-ness and even over busy-ness it is easy to judge the health of a congregation by how busy it is. Rainer's point is do less but do it deeper and do it better.

Find your strength and work from there. We, I think, are good at welcoming folks not just being friendly but really inviting folks to join us and be with us. We are good at connecting with people and we can build on that.

Thomas Ranier suggests that it helps to distill vision of the church to three words and gerunds work best something like:

Connecting Growing serving

connecting belonging transforming

And then make sure that everything you do is in strive of at least one of those three concepts

For example lets say our three words were connecting belonging transforming. Any decision we make would need to connect people, help them belong, or transform them or the world around us. Its that simple - Do our signs around here help people connect - do the signs help people feel like they belong? How are our bathrooms - answer the same questions. Should we add another chalice circle to our schedule - how will that group help folks to connect - or belong - or transform. Does that mythical path to membership exist in a way that is clear and understandable does it help people to connect and belong.

I don't know that those three words should be our words - maybe we as a congregation can do some thinking and talking about that over the next few months.

But lets not forget church should be simple

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And what keeps us from being simple

also from Tom Ranier

(https://thomrainer.com/2009/06/simple_church_revisited/)

1. **Traditionalism.** We do the same things we've always done because we've always done them that way before. If that sounds redundant, it is. We just can't get out of our boxes of comfort and false security.
2. **Lack of clear vision.** We pile on program after program and meeting after meeting because we have no clear plan or vision. A good vision will lead the church to say "yes" or "no" in a healthy fashion.
3. **Fear.** Many leaders fear the consequences of even suggesting the elimination of some programs, ministries, or activities. I know of no simple church without courageous leaders.
4. **Coasting.** This barrier is similar to fear. Some leaders don't want to rock the boat. They just want to hang on to their jobs or their peaceful existence. But the courageous leader is never a coasting leader.
5. **Failure to evaluate.** I have encouraged churches to consider a zero-based ministry every year. Ask the question: What ministries, programs, and meetings would we have if we had a clean slate? How would it look differently than our current schedule? Too many churches are eager to add but fearful to subtract.

Why should we go simple?

First and foremost I think if we take time to focus our ministries they will actually be deeper and more meaningful. We will more likely help to transform people in a positive way.

Second - How many times have you heard we don't have the volunteers to do that? I don't think that is because we have lackluster volunteers. I don't think that at all we have some of the best folks ever volunteering at this church and in our community. But it may be indicative of us trying to be too busy

Third we need to be about attracting a variety of age groups to this church community. Most of the folks I know under 35 are working really hard and they have neither the time or sometimes even the patience for meetings for the sake of meetings. do the planning in the most efficient way possible and then have the event be the thing that draws people in and together.

There was a wonderful time in our history when meetings were a way to gather together check in on each other catch up on the dates news and do some church business. But really that time has passed. For many folks information sharing and detail planning is done in emails, texts or messages. Some may see this dependence on technology as a distraction which it surely can be but I also believe that it can be a really wonderful thing. Say we wanted to plan monthly soup and bread dinners for our church as a way of creating connection and giving folks an opportunity its to do church off the Sunday time. We don't need to spend 2 hours every month in the parlor planning that - you get folks together at the beginning of the year set some dates develop a signup and PR process, and then for the rest of the year the volunteer time is not spent in meetings but in actually hosting wonderful dinners where folks can connect and make meaningful relationships.

The folks I know who are under 35 want real community real relationships. They can get all the busyness they want at work. They can get great art, and great music on their phone. They can listen to great ted talks for inspiration. But a place where they are welcomed in, treated with respect, asked to delve deep, encouraged to curiosity, held in relationship. That doesn't happen very often out there but it happens a lot here.

This vision of ours to grow will mean we will be considering different kinds of change - we will consider questions about worship, and membership, finances and building how we do RE how our children are included in the life of this place how their parents are included. We will be growing in numbers and as new people join us things will change. Coffee hour might look different and even better - who knows! This will make some of us anxious and some of excited.

But lets not get lost in that anxiety in that excitement lets simplify the complex. Our vision is to grow our mission is to share the saving message of Unitarian Universalism. Everything we do this year needs to be focused on that.

Go simple go deep.