

Dreaming Team Background, Specific Aims, Staffing Considerations, and Communication

Background

About a century ago, First Unitarian of Oakland was founded so that it could provide a religious center in downtown Oakland for a congregation of progressive religious leaders eager to play a role in this city's life and future development. They wanted to make a difference.

About a quarter century ago, what was then a very small congregation of progressive religious leaders chose to remain at 14th and Castro, rather than move to a much more economically feasible site as so many of our UU churches were doing, because we were eager to play a role in this city's life and future development from a in-the-middle-of-the-city visible location. We wanted to make a difference.

Neither choice was easy, but brave forward-looking decisions were made because this congregation believed then and believes still that the saving message of this church is meaningful and vital to the life of the city of Oakland.

Once again this church is committing itself to the further restoration of our building so that this important work can continue for another century and be available for our grandchildren's grandchildren to make a difference to the city of Oakland.

During all these years there have been many changes in the program life and the program priorities of the congregation. The real lives of families continue to change. The Dreaming Team is aware that as our congregation continues to grow and serve a larger and more diverse community, that periodically our worship and learning ministries need to be modified so that they better serve and are more targeted and inclusive of our beloved community.

We serve a significantly growing congregation; some Sundays there are 500 Unitarian Universalists (inclusive of all ages) in our worship and learning programs; this is a very high number for a mid-size church; and we know that this number will continue to grow as we continue to expand and deepen our ministries.

There are several important issues that we need to address with the current size of our worship community; these are essential to work on if we are going realize our goal of growing and serving a more diverse community.

- The 11:15 service is regularly filling to the point where there is limited room for newcomers in the pews.
- Children's RE classes are going over maximum capacity on some Sundays.
- Staff is stretched close to the breaking point trying to accommodate the needs of the children's RE program with current teaching staff.

The Dreaming Team believes we need to have an on-going process over the next few years to address these issues in our worship life as they evolve. We believe changes should occur in stages. Change is both exciting and disruptive. Making the changes in steps is likely to make the changes less disruptive and facilitate careful evaluation of the impact and refinements if the changes are not accomplishing our goals.

Specific Aims for Changes for Fall 2008

- Better balance attendance at the early and late services. This will allow more room for growth. It will also reduce some of the pressures on large children's RE classes which currently occur at the later service.
- Test modest modifications in one of the services to make it more consciously multi-generational.
- Create room for more diverse Sunday worship and learning experiences.
- Decrease potential burn-out pressures on staff.

Staffing Considerations

The staffing plan needs to be flexible; and staffing needs to be addressed further over the next year.

We will not need to increase paid Sunday morning teachers and there may be a slight reduction in the need for paid teachers.

We believe that this church must have a paid volunteer coordinator/match maker to deal with the administrative duties related to a robust volunteer activity in order to support a church of this programmatic complexity. Such a coordinator would be important to help support volunteers from our church in sharing their gifts to make possible some of learning ministry we envision.

With much larger attendance currently, and with expected further growth in the Fall, it is necessary to put full attention to engaging people in the work of the

church in all levels of service – short term Sunday morning commitments and longer term commitments. Our current staffing levels are too small to adequately support this growth without a full partnership with church members.

To date, our volunteer management systems overwhelm and exhaust our current volunteers. When our church attendance was smaller, volunteers could fill management roles very easily. With much larger church attendance, and more young families, our current jobs that volunteers are expected to perform are much larger and more complex, and too large for a normal member volunteer.

We believe that having a full time membership/volunteer coordinator/matchmaker position is crucial to connecting new congregants into the life of the church, and free up already engaged congregants to use their gifts to develop new, vibrant activities in the life of the church.

Communications with the Congregation

The Dreaming Team is putting together a comprehensive communication plan with two aims:

- Obtain input from the congregation on this proposal and make final refinements based on this input over May and June 2008.

- Bring this work to the attention of the congregation so that congregation is prepared to implement the Worship and Learning Ministry modifications in September 2008, specifically with services on May 18 and August 17, 2008, and conversations on May 18 and June 24 with the congregation.

As part of this process, the Dreaming Team proposes that the Committee on Ministry and/or the LEAP Council convene a Learning Summit on all our current efforts to be an intentionally multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-generational religious community so that the various groups directly engaged with this work can share their evolved-thinking and work-to-date with each other and with the entire congregation.

Dreaming Team Members: Rick Hecht (Chair), Giselle Ampuero, Charlotte Dickson, Molly Hermes, Sima Misra, Bev Smrha