

Evaluation of the UUCF Fellowship Program

The Program Evaluation Committee

March 9, 2013

1. Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to describe the Program Evaluation Committee's (PEC) assessment of the UUCF Fellowship Program. One initial question framed and motivated the evaluation:

Is the fellowship program at UUCF meeting the needs of the congregation?

The answer is complicated, but can be summarized as follows: Probably, although a few structural changes could substantially improve the program.

2. Background

The UUCF Governance Manual states in section VII.E.2 that "[t]he Board shall engage in comprehensive review of programmatic areas of the Congregation on a multi-year basis. This Programmatic Assessment shall occur on a schedule adopted by the Board. In conducting the Programmatic Assessment, the Board may form a committee to assess a particular area, or it may direct a Board-chartered committee to assist it."

The Board and the Coordinating Team (CT) decided that program reviews should be conducted by the CT in the first instance, with CT reports being submitted to the Board for its review. It was further decided that the first program review would be conducted during the 2012-13 church year.

In the summer of 2012, the PEC was formed as a subcommittee of the CT. A charter for the PEC was approved on September 11, 2012. The charter provides that "[a]t the beginning of each church year, the CT shall consult and agree with the Board on programs to be evaluated by the PEC." The charter further provides that the PEC "will submit its reports to the CT for review and approval in early spring, and the CT will forward the approved reports in a timely manner to the Board, so that essential data can be included in the UUCF Annual Report."

At the request of the Parish Minister, and with the Board's approval, fellowship became the first program reviewed by the PEC.

3. Scope and working definition of "fellowship"

To place reasonable boundaries on the scope of the evaluation, the PEC used the following definition for fellowship and the fellowship program:

Fellowship events are social activities that are not focused on worship, social justice, or instruction/education. Fellowship is celebrating and communing as a whole.

Other definitions were too broad. The closest official definition is in a draft charter for fellowship that was never approved: “social interaction among members and friends of the congregation.” This could include everything from a large party event to a conversation between two church members in the commons area after a service.

As discussed in more detail below, if fellowship at UUCF is to be a specific program, with its own charter and lay ministry, and if that program is to be the subject of periodic and meaningful evaluation by church leadership, then “fellowship” needs to have a clear, understandable, reasonably limited, and generally accepted definition.

It should be noted at this point that the PEC's definition and review of fellowship excluded some significant areas of church life that have strong fellowship elements, but have never been considered to be part of the fellowship program. These include covenant groups, which are under the responsibility of the ministers; adult programs, which fall under the lay ministry for education; the anniversary dinners, which are organized and run by the membership committee; and broad-based social justice activities, such the hypothermia and “Rebuilding Together” projects, which fall under the lay ministry for social justice.

The scope of the PEC's evaluation included the history of fellowship offerings at UUCF, including current offerings; participation in fellowship activities; and leadership's perceptions of the fellowship program's strengths and weaknesses.

The PEC did not conduct a needs assessment for fellowship. We considered the task of identifying needs, perhaps by surveying the congregation, of questionable utility. Nor did the Committee seek out the separate needs or participation of any subgroups within the congregation, such as older members, members with young children, or singles. Rather, and as a general matter, the PEC assumed that inter-generational fellowship events, with a focus on fun and community, are needed for UUCF members of all ages.

4. Methodology

The PEC's evaluation of fellowship included several actions:

- **Interviews.** The PEC developed a set of interview questions and, in November/December 2012, interviewed several staff and congregation members who had served in leadership positions. Interviewees are listed in Appendix A.
- **On-line Survey.** The PEC developed a short, on-line survey for the congregation to report their participation in fellowship activities during the last year (2012). Survey results shown in Appendix B.
- **Document Review.** The PEC reviewed a variety of documents:
 - UUCF strategic plan (2010-2013) for references to fellowship

- Charter for Membership, Outreach and Fellowship
- White paper on evaluation by Bob Hatfield
- PEC Charter
- Draft Fellowship Charter (never approved)
- UUCF Annual Reports for 2010-2012
- Participation in some previous fellowship events
- **Other Churches.** The PEC looked at web sites of local UU churches to see what they do about fellowship:
 - Do they have lay ministries for fellowship?
 - How are fellowship activities initiated and supported?

5. Findings

Fellowship is a vital part of life at UUCF because it directly supports the “Connect” component of the church's mission statement. Fellowship was formerly under the auspices of a stand-alone lay ministry, and is now combined with the membership and outreach programs under one lay ministry. However, there is currently no effective charter governing fellowship, which means that clear responsibilities have not been assigned to either the lay minister or the UUCF staff person providing fellowship support. Significantly as a matter of policy governance, the 2010-13 Strategic Plan contains no specific goals for the fellowship component of the combined lay ministry. And at the present time at least, there is no fellowship committee.

The absence of a committee that works in support of the lay ministry sharply distinguishes fellowship from other UUCF areas of lay ministry, such as religious exploration, membership, and social justice. The absence of a committee also means that many of the policy governance review metrics contemplated by section VII.E.2 of the Governance Manual – such as “significant input from the committees implementing the policy” and an assessment of the committee's performance “in achieving the Ends or Strategic Plan” – do not apply to fellowship.

Nevertheless, the PEC was able to make some significant findings.

Finding #1. The decline in the number of large-scale party events is not significant.

Older UUCF members sometimes point out that a number of large-scale party events once were prominent parts of the UUCF annual calendar and provided good opportunities for fellowship, but no longer exist. The events included the luau, the black-tie holiday ball, the Halloween party, the Valentine's Day dance, and the seafood festival, which used to be part of the church's in-gathering

weekend. The family retreat was a major event for families with school-age children, but it went out of existence several years ago. The adult retreat still exists, but is experiencing declining attendance.

Many of these events dated from a time when the church was more loosely organized and the lay ministries had not yet come into being. When the office of Lay Ministry for Fellowship was created, the church members who took on that job “inherited” those events and felt a responsibility to keep them going. However, the lay ministers experienced great difficulty in attracting volunteers to help them, unless those volunteers had a personal stake in the particular event. As a result, the lay ministers would end up doing much of the work themselves, which caused them to become discouraged and burned out. In fact, the decision to eliminate the separate lay ministry for fellowship and to combine fellowship with membership and outreach was the result of a strong recommendation by a former lay minister for fellowship.

Thus, large-scale social events at UUCF exist primarily when there is a critical mass of church members who want the event to happen. A good example of that at the present time is the chili cook-off, which has strong support from a good number of event leaders. When that critical mass of event “champions” ceases to exist, it should not be the responsibility of the lay minister for fellowship to try to keep the event going. Rather, the event should be allowed to go out of existence.

In sum, the decline in the number of large-scale party events at UUCF does not indicate a decline in fellowship. It simply means that the interests and orientation of the congregation have changed over time, which is natural and inevitable.

Finding #2. Measured by attendance, the major fellowship events are the chili cook-off, the auction, the in-gathering picnic, and the end-of-the-year picnic (also known as the annual picnic).

Measured by attendance, there are four major fellowship events. The chili cook-off has already been mentioned. Over 200 people attended it this year.

The auction deserves special emphasis. It is a major fellowship event, both in itself, and because of the numerous social events that are offered for auction by church members every year, such as dinner parties, guided tours, hikes, picnics, and so on. Over the last three years (2010-12), the auction has averaged 295 attendees. And yet, the auction has never been considered to be part of the responsibilities of the lay minister for fellowship. Recruitment of the auction chair has been done by the ministers, and the auction chair is then responsible for recruiting volunteers.

The in-gathering and end-of-year picnics are very important to the good health of the church, because they are inter-generational. Each typically attracts 150-200 people.

Finding #3. The deliberate scheduling of Second Saturday events has fostered fellowship.

In order to bolster attendance at the new third service on Saturdays, a deliberate effort has been made to schedule fellowship events (in addition to the events discussed above) on the second Saturday of each month. Examples include the spaghetti dinner, holiday greens hanging, the volunteer appreciation dinner, and the youth arts festival and concert (coming in April).

Attendance at these events has not been recorded, but can range from a low of 35-40 people for some events, to much higher for others. This does not compare to the attendance at the four major fellowship events, but the Second Saturday events are now an important part of fellowship at UUCF. Forty-seven percent of the respondents to the PEC's survey of the congregation indicated that they had attended a Second Saturday event (see Appendix B).

The PEC did not overlook the smaller and more intimate fellowship events, such as the circle dinners, that are enjoyed by many members of UUCF. Our survey showed the importance of these events, as indicated by the large number of respondents who checked "other" (see Appendix B). However, because they are small-scale events, the PEC did not consider them to be directly relevant to the thrust of this report.

Finding #4. Increasingly, responsibility for supporting fellowship events has fallen to the UUCF staff.

It appears that the folding of fellowship into a combined lay ministry that already has responsibilities for membership and outreach has led, by default, to greatly increased involvement by UUCF staff in championing and supporting fellowship events. The Second Saturday events have been described as largely staff-driven. The 2011-12 Annual Report shows the staff youth ministry coordinator as championing three events. The PEC was told that staff involvement is essential to the success of the in-gathering and end-of-year picnics.

This trend is similar to the treatment of fellowship at three other large Washington area UU churches: All Souls, Arlington, and Cedar Lane.

The "community" link on All Souls's website shows that a "Sunday Lunch Ministry" organizes and runs a lunch held twice a month on Sundays that is open to all church members. A small fee is charged. The "Ministry" was started by a church member.

At Arlington, there are a number of groups that offer fellowship events, including a "Friends and Family Weekend," which is similar to our former family retreat, and a "Fall Retreat," which is similar to our adult retreat. There is a "Day Alliance," which is similar to our former daytimers group, and a "Fellowship X" group, which is open to all but is aimed at "Generation X" members who were born in the 1960s and 1970s. These groups run their own shows; the "Fellowship X" group even has its own website. Support is provided by Arlington's "Membership Services" program, which is led by a staff member holding the title of "Membership Coordinator."

Similarly, Cedar Lane has a "Membership Services Committee" and a paid "Membership Coordinator." A major source of fellowship at Cedar Lane is the "Alliance," which is a larger version of our former daytimers group. The "Alliance" currently has about 90 members. It has its own funds and budget, and plans its own events. Fellowship is also provided by the "Adult Programs Committee," which is a combination of our adult programs activity (under the Lay Ministry for Education) and fellowship program.

None of those churches has a lay ministry with overall responsibility for fellowship.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, the PEC offers three main recommendations.

Recommendation #1. For programmatic purposes, fellowship needs to be defined.

Fellowship can be viewed as permeating every aspect of life at UUCF. Indeed, the act of joining the church can be described as a search for fellowship – for connection. However, if fellowship at UUCF is to be a program in any meaningful and coherent sense, then fellowship needs to have a working definition that clearly distinguishes the fellowship program from other UUCF programs that undeniably have strong fellowship elements. Without such a definition, it will not be possible to write a good charter or to have a lay ministry with understandable (and reviewable) goals and responsibilities. We cannot know if we are doing the fellowship program well if we do not know what “fellowship” under the program is or what we want it to be.

In evaluating the fellowship program, the PEC applied a definition of fellowship that was heavily based on what the program is not. The fellowship program is not an adjunct of worship, even though fellowship can be found in covenant groups and the Saturday polylogue. The fellowship program is not an adjunct of the adult programs activity, even though fellowship can be found in lectures and discussion groups. The fellowship program is not an adjunct of the social justice lay ministry, even though fellowship can be found by volunteering for Hypothermia Week and Rebuilding Together. And if the fellowship program is to be a separate program, it cannot feature events that foster fellowship but fall under some other part of its combined lay ministry, such as the membership committee's anniversary dinners.

A former lay minister described fellowship, as contrasted with membership and outreach, as follows:

- Outreach gets people to the door.
- Membership gets people through the door.
- Fellowship gets people integrated.

Some say fellowship celebrates who we are collectively. Or that it is really about feeling connected -- having a sense of belonging. The definition used by the PEC in this report focused on social activities that have no purpose other than fun and connection, and that allow UUCF members to celebrate and commune as a whole. The four major fellowship events discussed above fit that definition, aside from the fund-raising purpose of the auction. Although the PEC's definition doubtless can be improved, we offer it as a starting point for discussion.

Recommendation #2. If there is to be a fellowship program, it should have its own lay ministry.

The purpose of having a lay ministry is to provide leadership for the programs falling under the ministry's charter. By that standard, fellowship is currently without a lay ministry. This is not a criticism. It became clear to the PEC that it is too much to expect one lay minister to provide leadership for three different programs. As a result, rather than enhancing the fellowship lay ministry, the result of combining fellowship with membership and outreach has been to leave fellowship up to UUCF members

themselves, and to place the burden of supporting fellowship events increasingly on church staff. Therefore, the PEC recommends that if UUCF desires to have a fellowship *program*, UUCF should go back to having a separate lay ministry devoted solely to that program.

The alternative would be follow the trends that are already in place at UUCF and to formally adopt an approach similar to those in place at the Arlington and Cedar Lane UU churches. There would be no fellowship *program* as such, no lay ministry, no charter, and no overarching definition of fellowship. Rather, fellowship would be left to UUCF members to define as they wish through their own committees and their own events. Support for those events, as well as the existing fellowship events, would be provided by the lay ministry for membership and by the church's staff. This approach would be an acknowledgment, and probably an expansion, of the present role of the UUCF staff in supporting fellowship events. If staff hours devoted to fellowship needed to be expanded, then obviously there would be budgetary consequences. The advantages of this approach are simplicity and clarity. The problems discussed in this report could be put aside. It would no longer be necessary to wrestle with the question, "What is fellowship?" The longstanding difficulties associated with UUCF's lay ministry for fellowship, including getting volunteers to help, would be moot. And, the present uncertainties about the appropriate role for UUCF staff in an area that, at least on paper, is assigned to a lay ministry, would be settled.

Recommendation #3. If there is to be a fellowship ministry, whether separate or combined with membership and outreach, that ministry needs a charter that gives it focus, goals, and boundaries.

If there is to be a lay ministry for fellowship, the PEC strongly recommends that the ministry and its lay minister be given a charter that is focused and has specific goals and boundaries. This is particularly important given the consistent difficulty experienced by past lay ministers in having a supporting fellowship committee or other volunteers, and the unhappiness experienced by several past lay ministers.

We suggest that the lay minister for fellowship be assigned the following tasks as part of the job:

- Serve as a facilitator for fellowship activities defined as the following:
 - The In-gathering and End-of-Year picnic (two per year)
 - The Second Saturday events (about 9 per year). These already include the auction and chili events, plus holiday decorating and the spaghetti dinner. Those events might change, but Second Saturdays would still be viewed as intergenerational social events open to all congregants. The focus would be on fun, not instruction. The inclusion of the auction would be a significant change because, as discussed, the lay ministry for fellowship has never had programmatic involvement with the auction.
- As facilitator, the lay minister is not the person in charge of any one event, but more the coordinator for events, providing guidance and support and helping develop checklists and

other material of assistance to the champion for the event. Some events have ongoing champions, but all need to create some succession planning if they are to continue.

- If the congregation identifies fellowship events other than those listed above, the lay minister can provide the same type of guidance and support where practical. Any new event that has support and a champion should be welcomed, even if it is meant to be a one-time event.
- The focus and boundaries are intended to be guidelines; they need to be flexible to be practical.

7. Summary and Conclusion

The PEC concluded that given the wide range of fellowship opportunities at UUCF, the fellowship needs of the congregation are being met. In particular, there is no impediment in the church's structure to a new fellowship event being created, if church members organize themselves around an idea for such an event.

At the same time, however, the PEC found that there is not an operative fellowship *program* in place at the present time. UUCF is at a decision point with respect to the question of a fellowship program. If leadership deems it desirable to have a formal fellowship program identified as part of the church's organization, then the PEC recommends that a stand-alone lay ministry for fellowship be re-established with certain definitional and charter safeguards as described above. On the other hand, there are some advantages to formally adopting an approach similar to that in place at other UU churches, where the creation and nurturing of fellowship is left up to the members of the congregation, with church staff providing administrative support. At present, UUCF has one foot in each camp, and that should not continue.

Respectfully submitted,

The Program Evaluation Committee

Jan Cooper

Judy Stone

John Cunningham

Hays Gorey, Board liaison

Appendix A: Interviewees

The Program Evaluation Committee extends many thanks to the current and past UUCF leadership for their enthusiastic participation in the evaluation of fellowship at UUCF. Their insights and suggestions were invaluable.

- Rev. Mary Katherine Morn
- Bob Hatfield, past Board president, past chair of the old Review and Renewal Committee, and author of Feb. 2011 “white paper” on program review
- John Kun, Lay Minister for Membership, Outreach, and Fellowship
- Rich Williams, past Lay Minister for Membership, Outreach, and Fellowship
- Mary Foster, UUCF staffer for volunteer coordination
- Carol Jensen, UUCF staffer for member support
- Linnea Nelson, Director of Religious Exploration
- Craig Bennett, past Board president and past Lay Minister for Membership
- Mary Binderman, past Board president and past Lay Minister for Membership
- Kathy Bridgeman, past Lay Minister for Fellowship

Appendix B. Survey Results

With much advice and assistance from Mary Lareau, the PEC developed a brief survey that Mary posted on SurveyMonkey. The link to the survey was posted with a notice in the online newsletter for two weeks in late January/early February. To promote participation, the survey had only two questions:

1. In how many fellowship activities did you or a family member participate during 2012?
2. Which of the following did you or a household member participate in during 2012? [select all that apply]

The results are shown in the diagrams below. The responses were probably biased toward those who were more active last year; those individuals may be more attentive to the newsletter, and therefore have seen the request to respond to the survey. They may also be more likely to participate in fellowship events.

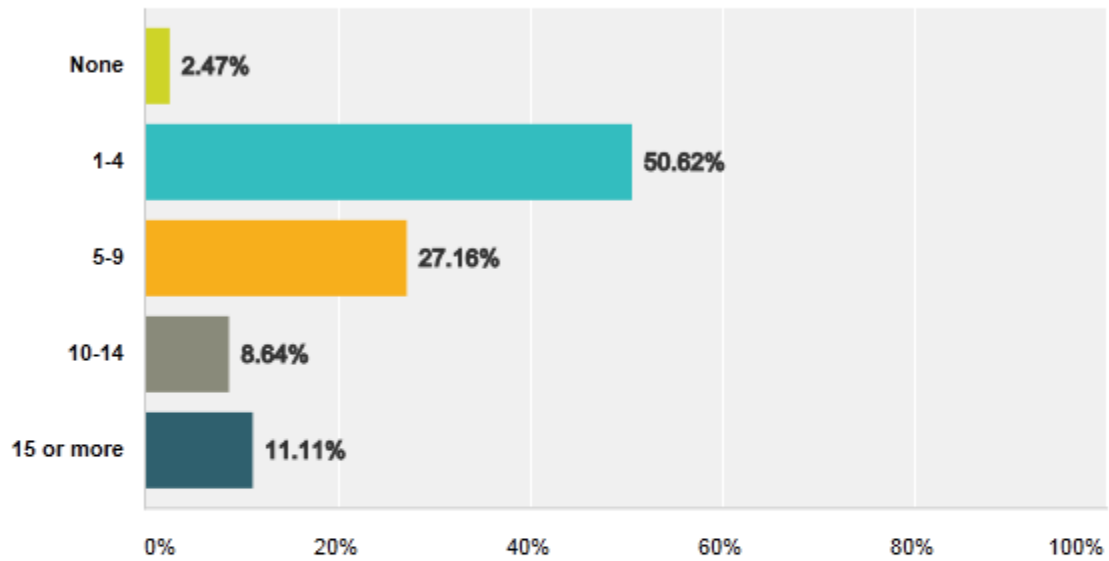
That given, 84 people responded to the survey.

- More than 95% attended fellowship events last year (respondent or family member)
- Less than 3% said they did not attend any fellowship events last year
- The auction had the highest participation (54%), closely followed by Second Saturday (47%) and Ingathering (41%) events
- 35 responded to the "Other" category, with a wide variety of responses with a wide variety of concepts of fellowship

Additional details are shown below.

In how many fellowship activities did you or a family member participate during 2012?

Answered: 81 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses
None	2.47% 2
1-4	50.62% 41
5-9	27.16% 22
10-14	8.64% 7
15 or more	11.11% 9
Total	81

Which of the following did you or a household member participate in during 2012? [select all that apply]

Answered: 81 Skipped: 3

