

Triennial Review of the Ministry of Allen Avenue UU Church 2017

Narrative Report

We believe these sessions were successful in gaining valuable input from a variety of participants on the ministry of A2U2 on what is working well, what we might want to do differently, and what our members hope and dream for A2U2.

Along with the "raw" results and a compilation of the interview results, we offer this narrative summary to the Board.

Sessions were conducted with approximately 80 members of A2U2, including the following groups:

- Board of Directors
- Buildings & Grounds Committee
- Personnel & Finance Committees
- Social Action Committee
- SEG Facilitators group
- Choir
- Pastoral Care Committee (one member)
- Worship Committee
- RE Committee
- Two All-Church Sessions (both sessions held on 11/19/17)

In our ministry review we reflected on strengths and opportunities for improvement in six broad categories, listed below.

- **Fellowship** - Mission statement: "We transform lives through the power of Love"
 - 3-Year Plan: "Building and supporting a Loving Community"
- **Spiritual Development** - Mission statement: "We encourage spiritual growth"
 - Including Theme-based ministry
- **Worship**
- **Service** - Mission statement: "We empower our members to share their gifts" – divided into service to the church community and service to the broader community
 - 3-Year Plan: "to remain engaged, refreshed and invigorated in our ministry together"
 - Including All-Church Focus
- **Outreach** - Mission statement: "We are growing a community...that celebrates diversity and promotes social responsibility"

- 3-Year Plan: “Outreach beyond our walls”
- **Process and Procedures**
 - Including Intern Minister

These categories, intended to cover most elements of our ministry, incorporate elements of our Mission statement as well as some of the foci of our most recent 3-Year Plan. The sixth category sought to capture the practical aspects of process and procedures that might support or hinder our mission. In addition, we sought feedback on several recent innovations. (Note: feedback on Intern Minister was placed under Process and Procedures simply for convenience.)

Finally, we started and ended each session asking participants to think about and then to share experiences when Allen Avenue has delighted, surprised or contributed to their life as well as initiatives that they wish our congregation would begin that we don’t have right now.

What follows is a brief summary of the thoughts recorded in these sessions, including what we are doing well in our shared ministry, the challenges we face and what might be considered to help us better achieve our shared mission. This summary is not exhaustive but is intended to provide a sense of the many ideas that our members shared. Board members may come to different conclusions as to what elements might be highlighted from these interview sessions.

Fellowship. Regarding ways that we currently foster friendship and fellowship, the opportunity to connect with other A2U2 members about shared interests was raised as a strong positive element over and over. The SEG groups were specifically mentioned multiple times, as were volunteering, committees, groups, classes, organized activities and informal get-togethers. Suggestions to better foster friendship and fellowship include improving the environment for coffee hour and informal gatherings, personal connections with visitors and newcomers, better connections between the two services and many other ideas for formal and informal activities and gatherings.

Spiritual Development. Myke’s sermons and classes, Spiritual Enrichment Groups, the community at A2U2, the music at services, other services and activities were cited as ways that our members experience spiritual growth. Suggestions to improve include more formal and informal opportunities to gain support from each other in community as well as more and different opportunities for adult enrichment, among others. Input on the theme-based ministry was varied.

Worship. Sunday and other services were cited as central to the A2U2 experience for many session participants. Myke’s sermons, the consistent order of service, wonderful music and member participation in services were cited as strengths. Suggestions to improve included keeping the service spiritually focused by separating out the announcements, more variety in the service including more involvement of community members from outside A2U2 and greater diversity of music. Also suggested were making the sanctuary more appealing, adding air conditioning, room arrangement, greater accessibility for those less physically able as well as improving & making better use of audiovisual technology.

Service to the A2U2 Community. There were cited many more opportunities to improve than things we are currently doing well in this regard. Service through Spiritual Enrichment Groups, RE, Choir and Pastoral Care were cited as positives.

Suggestions for improvement revolved around recruiting current and new volunteers and committee members through communicating opportunities more effectively, personal outreach, and following up on member interests. Also cited to improve were structured processes and activities to engage new members early-on, as well as finding alternatives for those who are less able to participate as programs are currently structured (including timing of gatherings, length of commitment, etc.).

Service to the Larger Community. Participants cited our engagement in social action as successful, including Family Promise and permaculture. While participants noted that A2U2 is very visible in social action, there were also many comments that we are not nearly as active as we have been in the past and that “we used to be seen as the social action church”. Suggestions to improve centered on a variety of ways to be more strategic in our approach, for example identifying a limited number of efforts and clearly communicating (both internally and to the larger community) A2U2’s social action priorities.

The “all church focus” was cited by many as having had a positive impact, connecting people to accomplish goals. There were also a number of suggestions to improve.

Outreach. Participants strongly endorsed the need to grow as very important to the success of our mission, citing the need for new ideas, youth and diversity. They also clearly stated that our current outreach is lacking and that we need to work to attract and retain members in a variety of ways, including advertising and publicity.

Process and Procedures. Eblast and Church Newsletter were cited as positives. Suggestions for improvement were many and varied, relating to volunteering, committees, communications, many different processes, audiovisual and technical issues among others. Comments related to intern minister were generally positive.

Delights / Hopes and Dreams. (i.e., “missing/would like to see”)

This part of each interview session was heart-warming and gratifying – thanks to the Board for suggesting concluding sessions in this way. It was clear that both facilitators and participants relaxed, breathed freely, smiled and shared their love for A2U2, our ministry and each other as a community.

Thanks to all the COM members, current and immediate past, who developed this process and carried it out, including John Howard, Noel Genova, Myke Johnson, Judy Field, Chris Malcolm, Cathy Falwell, Clay Atkinson and Gidge Veilleux.

Limitations

This process was qualitative in nature. We aimed to reduce bias to the extent possible, however we do not believe we captured all ideas with complete accuracy nor were we able to quantify input statistically. Another limitation is that parents of young children were underrepresented in these groups while people who already participate on committees were more strongly represented. Despite these limitations we feel that this process was successful in gaining meaningful information that reflects the what our congregation members feel is working well and where there are opportunities to improve.