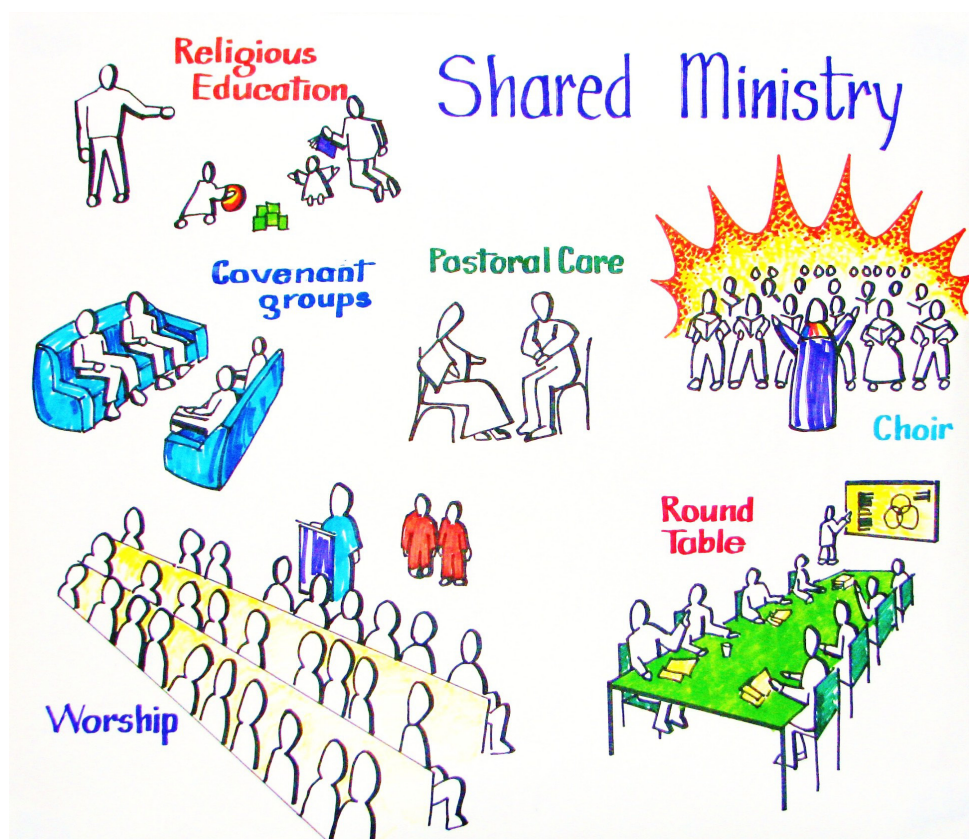




Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces

Dreams

From the Appreciative Inquiry Dream Summit
November 1, 2009



This illustration of one of the Dream Themes was done by Roy Van der Aa. The ideas came from the 70 persons who attended the dream summit.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces

Dreams

Report from the Appreciative Inquiry Dream Summit November 1, 2009

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**Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces
Appreciative Inquiry Dream Summit
November 1, 2009**

Overview and Comments on the Appreciative Inquiry Process to Date

This document contains the resulting dream statements and images that grew out of the Appreciative Inquiry Dream Summit attended by 70 church members and friends on November 1, 2009, at Wooten Hall on the campus of New Mexico State University. The summit is the second phase in our on-going four-phase appreciative inquiry (AI) process that was designed to renew our covenant with one another in the congregation in such a way as to move our actions toward the future that we desire as a UU community.

The foundation for the Dream Summit was laid during the first phase of the AI process when a team of 11 persons interviewed 110 persons who were members, friends, and professional staff of the church. In addition, the Director of Religious Education interviewed a group of our youth, the results of which were reported as the 111th interview. The interviews were exciting because they confirmed both the extent of passion and commitment that many of the interviewees have for participating in the programs of this church, as well as, their great yearnings to engage in positive change that will allow our church to grow. This desire for growth seemed to be premised on the notion that bringing more persons of all ages and cultures into our fold will allow us to spread the news of the values and practices of our UU faith. Of course, we may be biased, but most seemed to believe this would lead to a better world for all.

All the data gathered by the interview team (Judy Licht, Cliff Pelton, Maggie Locatelli, Julie Woody, Sally Hunt, Michael Hughes, Karen West, Billy and Cynthia Garrett, Joel Brown, and Jane Asche) was then analyzed in depth by a second team (Sally Hunt, Billy and Cynthia Garrett, and Joel Brown). The resulting information was compiled in a summary that is presented on pages 9-21 of this report. The analysis of the closing questions in the interviews resulted in a summary of our greatest wishes for the future that fell into five themes. These themes were used for brainstorming in five small groups at the Dream Summit to envision more precisely what that future might look like.

In this document we present five articulated dream statements that reflect these group discussions and each dream statement is accompanied by a drawing that represents images from our collective dreams for each dream theme. Each dream statement was crafted following the Dream Summit day by two or three people from each group. Then a group of church artists including four youth and four adults (Chantelle and Shaunia Grant, Molly Hurd, Rowan Van der Aa, Karl Kohl, Roy Van der Aa, Diane Taylor, and Judy Licht) drew the pictures for each dream statement.

In the next phase of the appreciative inquiry four phase cycle, the Design Phase, we will wed our dreams with our most recently developed long range plan so that we “put wheels” under that plan to move it forward to blossom into the church of our dreams.

In all, approximately 130 different people have been engaged in one or both of the first two phases. If you have yet to participate, it is not too late to join us in this soon to be launched third phase. It is the richness of the ideas of many about our perceived strengths and strategic advantages articulated through the interviews and our creative dreams in the dream summit that lead the way to a creative design phase. Please come join us in bringing the dream to life!

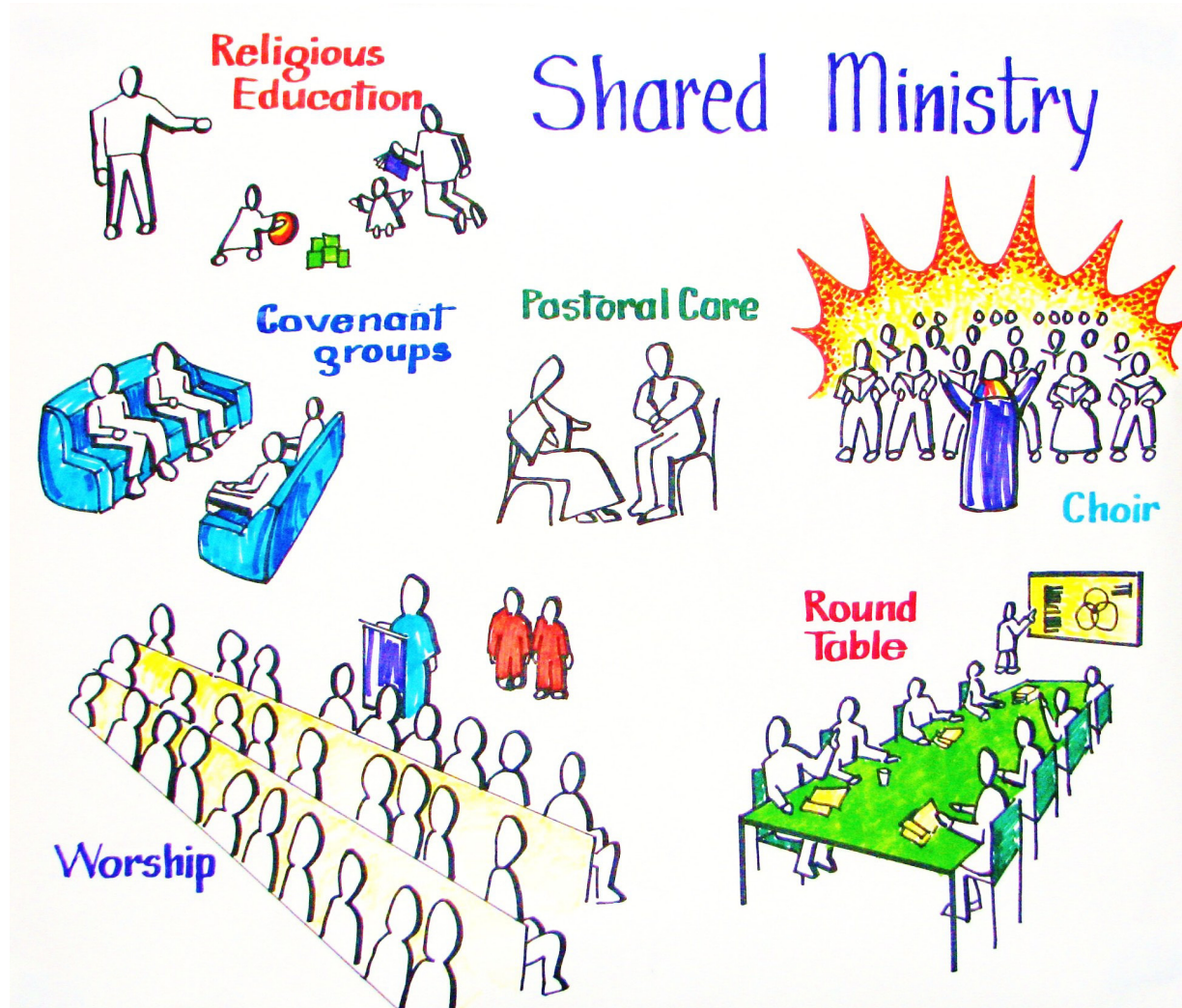
Joel Brown, Chair of the Appreciative Inquiry Process
Jane Asche, President of the Congregation

Dream Theme One: Our Shared Ministry

Our minister is engaged in daily pastoral care of our members, assisted by other church members as appropriate.

UUCLC Sunday services are filled with intellectually stimulating and spiritually moving content and meaning. This rich array of worship experiences is provided by not only our minister, but clergy from a wide array of religious backgrounds.

The UU worship experiences move outside the walls of the church building to places where others yearn for similar kinds of spiritual and intellectual inspiration. The services are so compelling that the media advertises our worship topics. Our minister and worship teams and Religious Education Director partner to create these rich worship experiences.



Dream Theme Two: Living Our Values

The Unitarian Universalist (UU) church of Las Cruces is a shining light of progressive ideas recognized in the community and has a diverse group of congregants: including young, working adults and retirees; Caucasian, Hispanic and other minorities; nearby neighbors and those afar; along with faculty and students from local educational institutions.

We use modern methods of communication like internet blogs, Face-Book, and YouTube to spread our message.

New leaders are willing to come forward to serve and are supported by both long-term and short-term members. We have adopted a city in a nearby country to spread the message of peace and prosperity and have become known as a center of creativity, cultural diversity and intellectual pursuits—through regular sessions in our facility that include both church and non-church members.



Dream Theme Three: Strong Fellowship

The UUCLC is a welcoming and connected congregation, diverse in religious thought and ethnicity, and shares strong fellowship within our church, never forgetting our interconnection with the wider community. All age groups are well represented in our congregation and young and old alike are visible full participants. Our services are attractive to people with diverse backgrounds and ages because they incorporate multiple worship styles, times, and content. We provide transportation to both members and newcomers to church and church-related events. Our church serves as a “safe haven” for a wide variety of backgrounds and beliefs.

We regularly join together not only after both services but throughout the week with a variety of activities. After both services we share discussions over meals and coffee, and we respect diverse dietary restrictions and ethical concerns when planning and preparing food. Outside of services times, we enjoy a variety of group activities, large and small, including many that cater to families and young, full-time working people. We host events that include big speakers and performers. In addition, there are many opportunities for spiritual retreats (e.g. Peace Camp for adults, men’s retreat, and family retreats). We are a church that not only worships together, but enjoys each others’ company in a variety of settings.

Our church values training and learning opportunities for both staff and congregation. We provide workshops about diversity, leadership, UU traditions/history, and where/how to refer out to local social services and community connections, as well as religious education for both young and adult. Through these efforts our congregants become fully informed of our traditions, finding their path within our spectrum of belief and values.

Community outreach and social action is an important part of our spiritual tradition. We share our ideas and beliefs with the wider community through functions such as community seminars, discussion groups, publicity for worship and Roundtable discussions. We energetically support local schools, including an active NMSU campus ministry and outreach to public schools, especially high schools. Through all these efforts the UUCLC shares strong fellowship within our church community, never forgetting our interconnection with the wider world.



Dream Theme Four: Facilities

Our beautiful and functional new church reflects not only our growth but our dedication to “total site planning” and debt reduction in recent years. The size and flexibility of this new facility promotes and accommodates still further growth of both congregation and staff.

Its architecture is considerate of, even inspirational to, the surrounding community. It is environmentally green, ADA compliant and has special features for youth and older members. The sanctuary and the social hall are designed, furnished and equipped to perform their respective functions in support of church life with style and flexibility. We even have a small chapel for meditation and small ceremonies.

The grounds provide not only plentiful parking but a youth recreation area, a memorial garden with columbarium, a large labyrinth, a community garden, and a parsonage. Long-range plans envision development of a residential community around the church complex.



Dream Theme Five: Finances

Our dream is to see a culture of generosity develop in our church and expand it into the greater community. We are accomplishing our dream by becoming a debt free congregation. We use gifts and pledges to establish a firm foundation to pay our expenses and establish realistic contingency funds for future needs.

We expand beyond our church perimeters by producing good programs that are open to the greater community and both interest our church family and attract people from the surrounding areas. The programs are funded by charging a reasonable fee or through grants and bequests. In this way we reach out to possible new members and at the same time we do not infringe on our operating budget.

The activities of all committees, such as Coffee Hour, the gallery, and adult programs, etc, operate within the donations collected, and we charge a set fee for facilities used by outside groups. We use fund raising projects only for special needs, not to support the operating budget.

Our finance process (budgeting, pledging, collecting and spending) is transparent so everyone can understand our needs and how we support them. We are always open to suggestions from the congregation and everyone who wants to be part of the financial planning. Developing finances is fun and we work together to live within our means.



UUCLC APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: A SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Section A: General Questions

A.1. First Impressions:

Question A.1.1 *What were your most positive and powerful first impressions of the church? What first attracted you to UUCLC and its people?*

First impressions of the church are a kaleidoscope of images: rainbow pins on name tags, introductions and conversation over coffee, watching an intense discussion end with laughs and a pat on the back. Varied as they are, most of these images are connected by *a general sense of warmth and friendliness* that the members of the congregation feel toward one another and extended to us when we first visited the church.

We also were drawn to the *values* we heard talked about and highlighted in services: a commitment to social action, openness to diversity, an emphasis on the search for truth.

And we were favorably impressed with *the approach taken to religious matters*: exploration of different religions, diversity of services, values expressed in the covenant, the quality of the ministers, and absence of a formal creed.

It may be worth noting that many of us came to UUCLC because we had been members of UU churches in other places and were looking to maintain our connection with the UU tradition. However, regardless of prior religious experience most of us found in UUCLC a congregation of people who were warm and friendly, whose values resonated with our own, and who pursued religious life in a way we could respect and appreciate.

A.2. Creating a Positive Church Culture:

Question A.2.1: *Reflect on a high point in your life as a member of this church - a time when you felt embraced, cared for, respected or enriched by the community. What was the situation? What happened? Who was involved?*

For most of us, the high points in our experience as church members have been when we were cared for and when we have had an opportunity to participate in church activities.

“Caring” has two dimensions. In one sense, caring refers to *a general and sustained feeling* of being valued, accepted and supported. Our choice to be a Welcoming Congregation contributes to this general sense of caring felt by some members. Others have remarked on the importance of this quality to them when they were serving in leadership roles—especially during times of difficulty for the church.

The second sense of caring has to do with feelings of *support at specific times of personal need*. We have felt and valued assistance moving into the community, counsel dealing with work-related stress and break-ups of relationships, visits during illness, and sympathy upon the death of a loved one. In these situations we have benefited from *caring by members of the congregation as well as our ministers*.

The other context that has left many of us feeling enriched and respected is the multitude of situations in which *we have been able to actively participate in church life*. These situations range from organizing the church auction to helping with Peace Camp, singing in the choir to taking an active role in worship services. We have been inspired by the vote to become a Welcoming Congregation, empowered by committee assignments, renewed by sermons, challenged by social action work. Our sense of being among kindred spirits has been reinforced by the 50th anniversary celebration, Roundtable, and the Women's Spirit retreat.

Question A.2.2: *What values or qualities were present in that experience and how could you tell they were present? Why are these values and qualities important to you?*

Special experiences in church life are meaningful to us because they are tangible evidence of our acceptance by others, they convey a clear sense of caring, and they involve us in shared leadership of the church.

Question A.2.3: *When you think about your experiences in other churches, what is it about their culture that makes them attractive? Would you like to see more of that quality in our church? If so, fast forward to the near future and describe how we are creating more of that quality in our church life.*

Desirable qualities we have seen in other churches begin with *more traditional worship services*. About a quarter of us said in our interviews that we would like more ritual, more reverence, a traditional layout for the sanctuary, and a more prominent role for the minister.

Other desirable qualities—which were mentioned about the same number of times—include: a *formal music program*, an atmosphere that felt *more like family*, and *strong sermons*. However, about the same number of responses were silent on this issue, suggesting either little experience with other churches or a feeling that other churches didn't have much to offer to us as models.

A.3. Articulating our Strengths and Strategic Advantages:

Question A.3.1: *What do you see as UUCLC's greatest strengths, core values, programs, or services? Can you think of a story that illustrates one or more of these strengths, values, programs or services? What ways of working together do you see in place right now that reaffirm and increase these strengths?*

Our church's greatest strengths are: ***a sense of community, social activism, and our ability to work together.***

Our principal core values are: ***personal responsibility for our faith, respect and acceptance of others, and a commitment to living our values.***

The hallmark program for the church is the work of the Social Action Committee.

Questions A.3.2: What do you believe are our church's most significant or distinctive advantages? As you envision the future, how are we building on and leveraging these advantages to be the best we can be?

Our church has three distinctive yet complementary advantages: our commitment, approach to spiritual life, and people.

We are distinguished by ***a commitment to living our values and principles.*** In this context our values focus on social activism, community involvement, and inclusiveness as a congregation. We build on these qualities by sharing joys and sorrows, flying the GLBT flag, supporting food programs and Peace Village, advancing the Green Sanctuary program, and helping young people develop healthy ideas through the OWL program.

Equally important, we are noted for ***an approach to spiritual life that exemplifies liberal religion.*** By this we mean that in comparison with other churches, we are noteworthy as a congregation associated with Unitarian Universalism. For some of us, this approach is characterized by a sense of religious freedom—we share a covenant rather than a creed, each of us is responsible for our own spirituality, and we respect other religions. In a complementary manner, others of us treasure our pursuit of truth through logic, science and reason. We are building on this advantage through an inspirational music program, engaging Roundtable discussions, and interesting adult education activities.

And, we are a congregation composed of ***a diverse membership that is well educated and broadly experienced.*** We are using this characteristic to attract new members—including college and high school students, incorporate new people in church programs and activities, and explore ways to improve the church based on the values, knowledge and experience of our congregation.

We should also note that UUCLC holds the distinction of being ***an established entity with a good organizational structure, solid financial management, and a significant physical presence.*** We are a good size now, yet have the capacity to grow. Our facilities are sound and well located. We have a good track record as an organization.

A.4. Creating and Sustaining Positive Energy:

Questions A.4.1: Tell me about a time when you experienced positive energy at church. What was the situation? What created the positive energy? How did it feel to be part of it?

We seem to find positive energy in almost every aspect of church life: ***building new facilities, participation in committee activities and programs***, and recurring events like dinners, the campout and community nights.

One activity that clearly stands out for the energy it generates is the annual church auction. For starters, the ***auction*** is fun—you hear lots of laughter. One person likened it to a “family tradition.” At the same time the auction takes plenty of work—but it has been so well organized that members who help with it are energized themselves by the cooperation and sense of purpose.

Another energy generator—in fact the one most frequently mentioned in the AI interviews—is our ***Sunday worship services*** and the ***music*** that is part of them. We tend to like services with varied forms and interactive style while also valuing common denominators like “joys and sorrows” and affirmation of the covenant. We enjoy inspiring sermons that get people thinking as well as annual celebrations like the Flower Communion, Day of the Dead, and May Day. And we really like the way that music has evolved to make our services more joyful, inspirational, and participatory.

Question A.4.2: What do you recommend to increase the level of positive energy at church? Imagine the church 2 to 3 years in the future. What promises are we making with one another to fuel this positive energy and keep it burning brightly?

To increase the level of positive energy in the church we should build on what’s already working for us: interactive, ***inspiring worship services***, a wide variety of ***social gatherings and activities that are fun and foster a sense of community***, and ***programs that are relevant*** to the interests and values of the congregation.

In addition, we should continue our tradition of ***involvement in church life*** for all members, foster ***a culture of transparency and trust***, and seek ***to grow both our membership and our facilities***.

As we grow, we must find ways to ***expand the diversity within the congregation*** by reaching out to a wider range of people in terms of ethnicity, age and “ability.”

Section B: Our Shared Community

B. Creating a Sense of Shared Community:

Question B.1: Tell me about a high point when you felt supported by our church community. What was the situation? What happened? Who was involved?

Members who chose to respond to this question focused on *committee work*, serving in the *choir* or assisting with a *worship service*, and participating in *covenant groups*. Most of the committees that were mentioned were internal committees such as minister search, welcoming and membership. Noteworthy committee work of an external nature included school supplies, Peace camp, and campus ministry.

In almost every case, members felt that these activities were personally meaningful because *another person got them involved or asked for their help*.

Question B.2: Recall a time when you provided leadership for a church program or had an opportunity to work with someone you consider to be an inspirational leader. Describe the situation. What do you most value and appreciate about such opportunities?

Primary opportunities for members to exercise their leadership skills as well as to work with inspiring leaders include:

- Serving as a member of the Board, especially during major projects.
- Working on church committees.
- Helping develop and implement outreach projects like Peace Camp and support for the J. Paul Taylor Center.
- Participating in the Choir or as a Service Leader for Sunday worship.

Question B.3: Picture the near future. What kind of opportunities are allowing or inspiring you to make the most rewarding contribution to the church?

Members who chose to respond to this question, emphasized the potential benefits of working on *internal church committees* like facilities, caring, leadership development, religious education, galley and youth.

Section C: Spiritual Growth

C: Providing opportunities for Spiritual Growth:

Question C.1: *Tell me about a time when you were on the receiving end of a quality moment – when a church service, religious education program or opportunity for dialogue inspired or delighted you. In what way, if any, did the experience enhance your relationship with a person or persons in the church?*

Church services have been a source of inspiration and delight to many members—especially ones with memorable sermons by our ministers. Other inspirational services have featured addresses by visiting speakers or resonant topics such as “Rise Up and Call Her Name” or guided meditation.

Programs and classes make up the second largest category of opportunities for spiritual growth. Covenant groups, for example, have been inspirational to some members. Other members have been stimulated by a good book review, workshop or speaker. And yet others have enjoyed the collective interaction of our annual campout or the Sunday Service Team.

While we might expect church services—as well as church programs and classes—to serve as a source of spiritual growth, ***other more secular activities*** such as music, volunteer work and participation in a Men’s group have also provided spiritual inspiration. Other noteworthy situations included leadership development school, participation in General Assembly or District meetings, and helping out during the minister’s sabbatical.

Although specific contexts differed, these experiences reinforced the feeling that our church is a community of like-minded individuals where each of us can be appreciated without judgment and there is room for something as profound as silence.

Question C.2: *Describe a time when your thinking was challenged or you were inspired to live more fully in accordance with UU principles.*

We are challenged to live our values through participation in church ***programs, groups and committees***. More than half of the members who responded to this question referenced Roundtable discussions and covenant groups in this context. Other challenging situations were linked to social action initiatives, political action, and the caring committee, as well as helping with Peace Camp, the OWL program, and the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Sunday services are another source of inspiration and of focused attention on UU principles. Sermons by our minister play a prominent role in this function. However, sermons by visiting ministers or speakers have also been noteworthy, as have services that directly address relevant issues such as harvesting cocoa, vegetarianism, mediation, and war.

And we should note that some of us find that an occasional acknowledgement of our personal connection with church principles serves as a continuous source of inspiration and challenge.

How can the church help you more?

Many of us feel that ***the church is currently doing as much as it can*** and simply want to ensure continuity of existing programs like religious education classes, covenant groups, Roundtable discussions and lay-led services. Two potential avenues for expanded attention to UU principles include **support groups** and organized *debates*.

As you envision growing spiritually, what new contributions do see yourself making to the church?

We have a variety of ways to further spiritual growth while contributing to the church. These include: expanded involvement in social justice issues, working on church committees or developing new programs, playing the piano for worship services, and leading meditation sessions. In a slightly different vein, one member would like to provide constructive feedback to others.

Section D: The Wider Community

D: Reaching out to the Wider Community:

Responsibility to our church is not limited to the work we do within our walls. One of our UU principles calls for us to practice justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Another asks us to pursue the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. “Reaching out” means developing, supporting, and participating in programs and activities that respond to the needs of our Las Cruces community.

Question D.1: Tell a story about when you were engaged in living these principles in the larger community, either locally or as part of a positive force in the world. What was the high point of your experience? What was your contribution?

Participation in any of the varied initiatives of the social action committee is seen by many members as important evidence of our willingness to “live our principles” in the larger community. Other noteworthy activities include ***advocating for peace*** and ***support for diversity and human rights***.

In addition to these church sponsored activities, some of our members have also had positive experiences “living our values” in ***“outside programs and activities”*** such as teaching or ***mentoring***, actively working in ***community organizations***—especially for kids, and engaging in ***political activity*** or ***community organizing***.

A third way members feel that they have contributed to the larger community is by taking active leadership roles or providing indirect support to externally focused programs and activities.

Question D.2: What resources does our church have that can benefit the community?

We, the ***people*** of this congregation, are by far the most important resource that our church has to offer the community. We are knowledgeable and skilled, we bring a positive and proactive approach to situations, and we are willing to share our time and other resources.

In addition, we have a suite of ***established programs*** that are well developed and operational. And finally, we have ***facilities*** including building space and land that could be used in support of community-oriented activities.

Question D.3: Dream into the future.... the church and community have a wonderful mutual partnership. What does this look like?

Church and minister would use a variety of techniques including web-based systems, informal get-togethers such as weekly barbeques, and word-of-mouth to ***increase visibility*** in the larger community and at NMSU in particular.

UUCLC would allow ***facilities*** to be used by or with other groups. Partnerships might result in use of church lands and facilities for a community garden or satellite food pantry.

Partnerships would focus on ***environmental and social issues*** including: animal rights, political action, sheltering abused women, and work by support groups such as AA, PFLAG, and JPTC. In other words, more of what we are already doing.

UUCLC ***membership*** would be revitalized, more diverse, larger in numbers, better informed, and more attractive to those who benefit from our programs.

Describe the three most compelling partnerships between the church and other organizations that are getting unprecedented results for the church and you?

- J Paul Taylor Center
- Peace Village
- Casa de Peregrinos & Community of Hope
- Support for schools

What are we doing to realize the promise of these partnership responsibilities?

- ***Reaching out*** – to groups with similar values and concerns, to engage other churches, to become a voice in the community.
- ***Taking care of partnership “basics”*** – we’re enthusiastic but realistic, we have a large pool of volunteers, and we respect differences.
- ***Building a good reputation*** – as a “go-to” church when things need to be done, by demonstrating results, and by maintaining our identity as UU’s.
- ***Establishing a solid base of support*** within the church – in leadership development, educating the entire congregation about partnership issues, and reporting results to the congregation.

Section E: Growing our Congregation

E. Identifying the Possibilities for Growing our Congregation:

Question E.1: Can you think of a time when there was a spurt of growth in our church? What were the circumstances? What decisions, actions, projects or programs fueled the growth?

Two factors have been especially conducive to growth of the church: ***development of engaging and relevant activities***, and ***increased visibility in the community***. Examples of catalytic programs include: Roundtables, covenant groups, OWL and adult religious education. A critical characteristic of these programs is that they are relevant and encourage greater social interaction. Social action projects, the church web site, and church members maintaining their UU identity while working in the community have all contributed to increased visibility.

Question E.2: What trends and changes are you seeing in Las Cruces or the larger world that excites you and gives you a sense of confidence in the possibilities for the church’s future?

Large numbers of retirees are moving to Las Cruces. Within that pool there are certain to be a number of people who share our values and could become energetic and engaged members. Similarly, ***NMSU, White Sands and the Spaceport*** draw skilled, well-paid professional people with lots of experience and knowledge who might be attracted to our church. Las Cruces is a multi-cultural community that is, for the most part, generally tolerant of diversity in many forms. UU values of tolerance and respect for diversity may enable us to attract ***a broader and deeper range of diversity*** within our membership that more closely reflects the population as a whole.

Question E.3: Given the trends, imagine the church 5 years from now. Who are we attracting to our membership and how are we doing it?

We are going to continue to attract the same types of people that currently make up most of our congregation: university faculty and students, retirees, and GLBT. We have the capacity and interest to diversify our membership in three primary categories: Hispanics, families with children, and young adults (ages 20 – 35).

Expansion of the congregation and our ability to attract new members will depend upon new and better facilities, as well as, new and improved programs. However, to be successful our strategy ought to include four other components:

- ***Highlight and build around our UU values*** – Be “welcoming” and accepting of different viewpoints, point out the high level of involvement by the congregation, our social activism, and the quality of our organization.
- ***Embrace the multicultural nature of Las Cruces*** – In particular, learn more about the Hispanic culture and demonstrate our sensitivity to that culture by recognition of traditions, symbols and the (correct) use of Spanish.
- ***Promote the church and make it more visible in the community*** – Use the Internet (web site, U-Tube, videos, links) and other non-electronic means to get our message out to members and potential members. Pay attention to the interests and communication styles of both specific and general audiences.
- ***Explore ways to increase the relevance and power of our Worship Services*** – A few of the potential changes include an expanded role for music, more spiritual opportunities, and “talk backs” with the minister. Other ideas include a weekly children’s chapel, inter-generational services, and non-traditional services other than on Sunday.

What kind of programs are we offering?

Our program offerings will probably build on existing successes such as: Roundtable, Peace Village, adult religious education classes, covenant groups, and social action work. We might also expect greater emphasis on emerging concerns such as environment ethics (green sanctuary) and border issues. Attention should also be given to the interests and needs of various groups of members based at least in part on age. This kind of approach might support such diverse activities as thai chi classes, lunches for college students, multi-cultural retreats, and dances.

What do our facilities look like?

It would be nice to have a sanctuary that can accommodate the entire congregation at one sitting. Other suggested changes range from refinements of existing foyer and church offices to entire new buildings, as well as development of the site to include a community garden and expanded parking. Major construction projects might include: a social hall with kitchen, more classrooms, a gazebo, and a gym with basketball court.

Section F: Closing Questions:

Question F.1: Pretend you have a magic wand you can wave over the church. What three wishes would you like to grant to the church to heighten its health and vitality.

Responses to this question covered a wide range of ideas and were expressed with varying degrees of detail. The following five themes are an effort to organize this data in a manner that is practical yet sensitive to the intentions expressed in the interviews. A selection of individual responses is provided below each theme.

- ***A strong fellowship noted for its diversity, caring and humor*** – as we grow we will enhance the range of diversity within our membership, in particular with respect to young adults with children and ethnicity. We will maintain our sense of warmth and tolerance, our care for one another, and the richness of opportunities for participation in church life.
 - I would like to see more families with high school kids here, because UU kids can have a great affect on their peers.
 - Enlighten (touch) all members as to their true value, their true abilities, true talents, and how these can be essential to the church. They know they are valued and essential.
 - Expanded diverse congregation which is larger, but not necessarily huge.
 - We have a way for children to share what is on their minds.
 - We should become more representative of Las Cruces, as a whole. Better connections with the Hispanic community – more diverse in terms of language, age and culture.
 - Better communication dealing with concerns in a constructive manner.
- ***A reputation for programs and service consistent with UU principles*** – we will build on the work being done through various church committees to “serve others in community to the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with creation.”
 - Wouldn't it be wonderful if the City and County Commissioners would come to wonder, “What are the UUs going to think about this issue?”
 - We would become a Peace Resource Center.
 - We have a time every three months that we hold a public forum in the church where anybody can come and talk about issues that they believe need attention in the community.
 - More programs to make our church a social center: yoga, Buddhist meditation, music groups, bingo, an open mic coffeehouse, and movie nights.
 - Our church is expanding opportunities to help the Booker T. Washington 5th graders get an education and learn ways to make a living.
 - We have special programs for young adults and children's groups such as those that serve the needs of the GBLT groups and the border communities.

- ***New or upgraded facilities*** – we would like to see improvements in our existing facilities--such as a new sound system and improved handicapped accessibility, a larger social hall with kitchen, and a larger sanctuary.
 - A vegetable garden for the church / community.
 - We have a more aesthetic building inside and art on the walls throughout the church – exciting art. The Trantham windows are a great start, but now we have more.
 - Get rid of the steeple.
 - The church sanctuary would be updated and larger; it would have a good system of air conditioning and heating and excellent sound equipment for hearing impaired.
 - A parsonage on the land we own.
- ***An improved financial situation*** – by this we mean that, in general, we would like to have a larger budget as well as a better long-term financial position.
 - We have enough money to support our programs, do more outreach and bring more visiting ministers and musical events to our sanctuary...
 - A benefactor give(s) money to set up endowments to be used for scholarships ...and job skills training.
 - We need more money.
 - Each member made(s) a truly generous pledge each year – see average pledge increased by 25% or more...and be a “Fair-Share” church within the UUA.
- ***An inspirational and compassionate ministry in the tradition of liberal religion*** – in accordance with our evolving vision for the church we will assess, adjust, and refine the roles of minister and laity regarding worship services, pastoral care, religious education and church leadership and will develop a succession plan for the minister that is responsive to those interests and needs.
 - The Minister and Program Committee will include theists and liberal Christians in their thinking and planning so those groups feel more included; there will no be eye-rolling when God or Jesus are mentioned.
 - A bilingual minister.
 - More “experiential” services – less “in-your-head” stuff
 - The services and sermons are meaty with good well-researched presentations.
 - The positive energy just keeps increasing.
 - We will come to better understand and appreciate the dynamics of covenanting with a leader (minister) and mapping out a common vision for the community.
 - Our minister would have more personal contact with our elders.

Question F.2: What is the most important thing you have learned or re-learned about your experience in our church as a result of our conversation?

About 80% of the members who participated in Appreciative Inquiry interviews offered thoughts in response to this question. The following selections were chosen in hopes of conveying the range of their responses.

- How caring and supportive we are of each other.
- The importance of feedback.
- I am truly a UU.
- How vulnerable and easily hurt we are when we invest in the church.
- We can be so much more than we are.
- How much I value this church and the people in it.
- I'm optimistic that our Board is listening to our needs.
- Each minister has made important contributions.
- I do have something to give!
- Differing opinions are important.
- This is where I belong.

Question F.3: It will help our analysis to know a few facts about you.

How long have you been a member of the church?

| <i>Members participating in interviews</i> | <i>Number of years as a member of the church</i> |
|---|---|
| 6 | 40+ |
| 7 | 30-39 |
| 9 | 20-29 |
| 19 | 10-19 |
| 65 | 1-9 |
| 8 | Less than 1 year or unsure |

How would you judge your level of involvement in church life?

| <i>Members participating in interviews</i> | <i>Level of Involvement with the church</i> |
|---|--|
| 35 | Highly |
| 6 | More than somewhat |
| 46 | Somewhat |
| 2 | More than marginally |
| 17 | Marginally |
| 2 | No response |