

CENTER FOR PROGRESSIVE RENEWAL REPORT SUMMARY

Renewal Team, December 2017

BACKGROUND

BCCUCC engaged CPR to assess our church's current status and develop some recommendations for the future. William "Bill" McKinney met with 65 members, staff and friends of BCCUCC as well as town leaders over the last weekend in September. In his words, "I was asked to assist Barrington Congregational Church, UCC with a general assessment by defining its current realities, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to provide recommendations for strategic next steps in the church's ministry. This assessment is designed to inform a new strategic plan for the church." This summary strives to convey the essence of his report. The full report is available on the church website and by request. Thanks to all who so graciously participated.

ASSESSMENT

The report begins with a brief historical summary leading to our current location, community and budget. Bill highlighted some key points from an associated statistical abstract of the area and noted the community is remarkably homogeneous and over the next ten years the fastest growing age group will be those 25-34 years old, followed by those over 65. The 34-54 age group is expected to decline. The report also indicates that about 8249 (17%) of 48,000 in Bristol County are "unchurched."

Bill stated we have a strong loyal core in our congregation. Members were attracted to BCCUCC for social justice, youth programs, affiliation with UCC and by invitation from friends and pastors. Our Mission Statement and Open and Affirming Position are powerful assets.

Conversations with town leaders revealed stresses in town to include continued support for our high level schools in spite of elders' resistance to funding them, affordable housing (2%), maintaining the community where it is and staying who and what we are, and the need to deal with the hidden poor population in town. "We are stuck with the label of incredible wealth and the label lets us overlook some real issues in town" said one leader. (Recent teen suicides, alcohol, drug abuse, and wild parties for example.) "Too often we over-rely on the police and schools to be our problem solvers when these are really community-wide concerns that need the whole community's attention." Leaders would like to work with an interfaith council of churches in town to address issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bill recommended we think of BCCUCC's ministry as a three legged stool.

- One leg is COMMUNITY OUTREACH. More than most churches, you are deeply committed to community service, outreach and advocacy. You do this well.
- A second leg is SERVING YOUR OWN PEOPLE. You now have an opportunity to take new initiatives in faith formation and spiritual development. I sense that this is also an area of future growth. As people begin to gain greater sense of self-affirmation they are also ready to grow spiritually and intellectually.

- The third leg I will call CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Here is the opportunity to envision and build a vision for the Church as a progressive and strong presence in Barrington and the surrounding areas. This includes some hard thinking about a plan for membership development, leadership development, stewardship, communications and governance.

BCCUCC'S future, Bill believes lies in large part in its ability to reach out to neighbors who currently have no religious home to build membership.

BCCUCC does very little to let the community know who you are and what you stand for. The rainbow flag and doors are conscious attempts to communicate a message to the population beyond your membership. You need to do more of this and to identify "entry points" through which non-members can find ways into church involvement. In the future it will be important to develop strategies to let potential members know you are alive and well and that you welcome their participation.

BCCUCC needs to learn to think of programs it develops for its members as having the potential to attract neighbors who currently have no faith community. Your OWL program is a good example.

BCCUCC needs a long-term financial plan that projects future income and spending. You also need a capital improvement plan. More member education about the church's current financial situation would be welcomed by most members. One way to do this might be a series of public meetings as you develop the long-range plan.

Bill noted many positive comments and commitments from the discussions including a caring, supportive membership, commitment to mission and social justice, good location with attractive buildings. Concerns include the unclear source of our next members, fiscal uncertainty and transparency, scattered communications and the lack of an active personnel ministry team. The challenge from this report is for us to build on our strengths by developing strategies to develop our community outreach, enhance congregational development, and challenge the narrative of decline with a "strategic plan [and] positive Alternative Vision". Achieving a few visible victories along the way will help members understand that [we] have a bright and sustainable future.

CONCLUSION

Having just completed a year of celebrating the 300th Anniversary of the Barrington Congregation Church UCC we learned what our predecessors accomplished to make our church the pillar of faith and beacon of light it is in Barrington. Our new weathervane was installed on November 20th. Let us all look at it with a vision to sustain us for another three hundred years. BCCUCC has a strong loyal congregation and we look forward to working together to define our future.

Faithfully,

Larry Ashley, Dale Azevedo, Tom Colby, Erik Ela, Marion Foder, Helen Schall, Heather Williamson

Please do not hesitate to contact any of us with questions.