Rev's Reflections

In case you missed it, on Saturday the Board hosted and facilitated a listening/brainstorming session about the Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Hopes we are graced with now. It was a chance to get real, assess and think about "big, hairy, audacious goals."

More than 30 people showed up, and afterward, I was amazed at how the responses were all over the map in every category. While a lot of what I heard was not new to me (I am listening!), there were a couple of areas of dynamic tension I noticed that I wanted to share with you here.

The thing that popped up all over the place was that we need new people to join us, most often expressed as "growth." While numerical growth in membership was probably the intention of the expression, it made me ask "what kind of growth?" Spiritual growth individually and collectively? Maturational growth as an organization? Growth in influence within our community or at the State House?

One of the ways growth was expressed several times was in the form of recruiting, especially recruiting families with children, including parents who can assume leadership in Religious Education and committees of the congregation.

As I've said before, if we focus on and experience the "other" types of growth, numerical growth will just happen. On its own. We won't have to force it. People want to join organizations that are vibrant, expansive, future-oriented, the kinds of organization that help them be the kind of people they want to be.

Every study on faith in America concludes that families gravitate toward organizations which serve the community as well their families. They join congregations that: share their values; identify and address the needs of their neighbors; and give them opportunities to engage in meaningful ways, without a lot of fuss.

And it helps when the congregation can be welcoming while providing religious education — and maybe even a little childcare — that doesn't conflict with the endless demands on the time of today's children.

That's not to say that families are looking for freebies. They just need us to help them join our community. We can't do it alone, and neither can families!

So, I find myself wondering: how do we get past the idea of "recruiting new people," to adopt a culture of service to others? It's tough when times are changing as fast as they are. And I know that we are not alone in facing this challenge. The good news is that we have each other to figure it out together.

In Peace,
Rev Denis