

# Building Community

UUCDC Communications and  
Membership Development Path  
Forward

APRIL 4, 2023

“

Above all, it was the sense of community that participants cited as the factor that sustains them and keeps them coming back.

They described a warm, safe and welcoming community supported by a socially conscious fellowship; a setting where people are comforted by being with others that are known to them; a community that shares the same views and feels a sense of commitment to each other and to our youth.

”

—MARK BERNSTEIN, LISTENING SESSIONS REPORT

“ We need to make ourselves look good to prospective ministers and bring people back. ”

—MEGAN GRISSOM

““ Communication is the only area where I think UUCDC fails miserably. Thanks for anything we can do to improve!

—UUCDC MEMBER, QUOTED IN COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT ANDREA BRISCOE'S FOCUS GROUP REPORT

””

# Communications *is* a Core Function of the Church

- ▶ Yet, no group or person at UUCDC owns responsibility for communications strategy and planning
  - ▶ This predates Peter's retirement
- ▶ Members and attenders have described our communications as confusing, chaotic, not-timely, not always getting to the intended audiences
- ▶ The question: Are we treating communications as a core function of our church?

# What's Missing?

- ▶ Leadership
  - ▶ Without a person or team to lead this core function, there is no ownership or accountability for comprehensive and coordinated communications activities
- ▶ Planning
  - ▶ Without a plan, there is no coordinated effort to define specific needs and goals
  - ▶ Or to set budgets, priorities, and resources to meet the needs
- ▶ Budget/Resources
  - ▶ Without budget and other resources, we will not be able to execute on important and valuable priorities

# What Can We Do?

- ▶ This path forward directly addresses the core problem of what is missing
- ▶ Does not initially require as many resources as you might think, nor cost as much as you might fear
- ▶ We actually have quite a bit of "low-hanging fruit" to leverage as we get started

# Data Gathered and Analyzed

- ▶ Work of communications consultant Andrea Briscoe (2020-2021)
  - ▶ Communications audit results
  - ▶ Member survey results
- ▶ May 2022 communications brainstorming session
- ▶ Summary report from Board listening sessions (2023)
- ▶ Review of other UU churches' websites
- ▶ Review of UUCDC website and social media
- ▶ Consuming church communications as Members
- ▶ Consultations with Rev. Roger Fritts and Megan Grissom
- ▶ Input from Jennifer Gould, Lori Rice-Springer, Executive Team
- ▶ Research, analysis, and recommendations by Randall H. Duckett



With effective communications, UUCDC can benefit from community building, connectedness, belonging, volunteerism, attracting new members, and giving

# Assessment of Current Channels

10

- ▶ Engagement with current outreach channels is mixed
  - ▶ Moderate engagement with the website (2,000 to 3,000 views, about 1,000 visitors per month)
    - ▶ Website is how Seekers shop for churches, yet ours is confusing, not well organized, often out-of-date
  - ▶ Digest is most effective
  - ▶ Religious Education attracts engagement
  - ▶ Low engagement with Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube
    - ▶ Three different Facebook pages
    - ▶ Twitter is just repurposed Facebook posts
    - ▶ Engagement greatest with social justice tweets
- ▶ Outreach mix: 80 percent events, 20 percent values

This path forward is based on what we learned; it's *by* and *of* the church

# Goals

12

1. Build a greater sense of shared community, identification, affinity, and belonging
  2. Bring people back to UUCDC after pandemic shutdowns
  3. Increase membership, build attendance, boost volunteerism
  4. Increase pledges and donations
    - ▶ Improve church resources (volunteers and financial)
    - ▶ Emphasize duty to support church
  5. Give interim and settled ministers a strong platform and clear program to execute
    - ▶ Don't make them start over and solve the problem
    - ▶ Show the ministers that the UUCDC community is active, vibrant, and powerful
- 
- ▶ These are the five standards against which UUCDC communications should be judged

# Audiences

- ▶ Members and attenders
- ▶ Seekers
  - ▶ Including people looking for a liberal spiritual home, social justice folks, young families seeking a church for their children, people who've left their childhood church and want a different kind of religion
- ▶ Secondary
  - ▶ The new interim and settled ministers
  - ▶ Media (newspaper, TV, publications)
  - ▶ Delco leaders and residents
  - ▶ Community partners (Share the Plate, etc.)
  - ▶ Philly area social justice leaders
  - ▶ UUA and other UU churches

# Recommendations

# Establish Communication Leadership Team

15

- ▶ Accountable for:
  - ▶ Strategy, approvals, decision-making, recruiting, continuity, policies, and spending regarding UUCDC communications activities
- ▶ Members
  - ▶ Communications coordinator—Jennifer
  - ▶ Communications consultant—Randall
  - ▶ Executive Team liaison
  - ▶ Minister—new interim

# Establish Communications Execution Team

16

- ▶ Responsible for carrying out communications activities
- ▶ Members
  - ▶ Communications consultant—Randall
  - ▶ Communications specialist—Megan
  - ▶ Digest team—Bryan and Craig
  - ▶ Three execution specialists to be recruited
- ▶ With a clear path forward and structure, we believe we can motivate people to join the team
- ▶ Establishing leadership and execution teams and building planning and development into our regular operational activities will demonstrate that communications is a core function of UUCDC



# Minister's Communications Role

17

- ▶ The Minister is the communicator-in-chief
  - ▶ Has a role in both leadership and execution
- ▶ A critical source of ongoing, continuous communications with the congregation
- ▶ An important source of feedback
- ▶ The minister carries gravitas, yet let's not let communications leadership and planning depend on one person again—it is not healthy for too much responsibility or burden to rest on one person

What's Next? Low-Hanging Fruit

# Year I: Low-Hanging Fruit

19

- ▶ Projects for FY 23-24
  - ▶ Build on what 's already been done
- ▶ Establish a Core Message as a foundation of our communications moving forward

# UUCDC: Where You Belong

# UUCDC: Where You Belong

- ▶ Meaning 1: UUCDC is the place you *should* be
- ▶ Meaning 2: UUCDC is a community where you are a *valued* Member
- ▶ Speaks *directly* to both primary audiences
  - ▶ Members and attenders
  - ▶ Seekers

# Year I: Low-Hanging Fruit (cont.)

22

- ▶ Refresh/reorganize the website
- ▶ Re-energize social media
- ▶ Boost leadership communications
- ▶ Rebrand the Digest and social media channels
- ▶ Improve feedback channels
- ▶ Explore additional funding sources while in the program-building mode

# Year II: Transformational

23

- ▶ Projects for FY 24-25
  - ▶ Plan to fund a broader slate of projects that will require additional resources and will likely net more significant results
- ▶ Rebrand UUCDC (standard look, logo, fonts, colors, etc.)
- ▶ Launch a new website (bring it up to contemporary standards)
- ▶ Establish a media relations program (press releases, op-eds, press kit)
- ▶ Track results (determine and assess metrics of success)
- ▶ Invest in projects that will move the needle on attendance, membership growth, giving

# Timing

- ▶ Coordinate with the arrival of new interim and settled ministers
  - ▶ Be sure communications are part of minister job description so that duties and authority are clear
  - ▶ Don't let uncertainty about minister derail path forward
- ▶ Initiate path forward now for FY 2023-24
  - ▶ Jump start a continuing, consistent, and creative communications program
- ▶ Commit to plans to continue program for FY 2024-25
- ▶ In 2025, revise and refresh plans for FY 2025–27



# Budget Estimates

25

- ▶ Year I: FY 2023-24
  - ▶ \$5,000 to \$7,000
  - ▶ Authorize Communications Leadership Team to handle budget similar to other UUCDC groups
  
- ▶ Year II: FY 2024-25
  - ▶ \$12,500 to \$20,000
  
- ▶ Eventually 5 percent (status quo) to 10 percent (growth) of the church's budget should go to communications
  - ▶ Source: United Methodist Communications

# Effective Communications Can Bring Members and Seekers Back

- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic is the elephant in the room
- ▶ The pandemic caused many to drop out and drop off when it comes to church engagement
  - ▶ Volunteerism is down
  - ▶ Donations are down
  - ▶ Attendance is down
- ▶ Existential problem
  - ▶ Improving attendance and engagement are essential to the continued existence of UUCDC as a vital community

# Why Approve This Path Forward?

27

- ▶ UUCDC is in the community-building business
  - ▶ Including attracting new Members and attenders
- ▶ To identify and affiliate with UUCDC, people need clear, consistent, creative outreach
  - ▶ Communication must go two ways—from the church outward and from Members and others inward
- ▶ Effective communication affects the church's ability to serve its Members and attenders, Seekers, and others
- ▶ This path forward is a strong start on solving what is missing with communications
- ▶ The bottom line: Communication is a core function of UUCDC and should be seen and funded as such

This path forward is relentlessly  
practical, affordable, and  
executable

Let's get started

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION