

Berrien Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
President's Report
2018

*"For every individual searching for spiritual meaning, Berrien Unitarian Universalist Fellowship provides a warm and caring religious community dedicated to social and environmental justice and peace for all."
Mission of the Berrien UU Fellowship, revised 2016*

At the 2017 Annual Meeting I urged BUUFers to 'Never do alone that what you can do with five other people'. The idea was that getting people involved—in any way—would promote community and create belonging. Personally I could have stayed closer to my own advice—especially with semi-weekly bathroom cleanings—but our Rev. Jim McConnell is really living that message. Before I say more about that, let me share a bit of not-too-distant history.

In 2015 BUUF seemed to be approaching certain dissolution (my opinion). There was significant dissatisfaction with Sunday Service delivery and content, attendance was declining, and there were no children for RE. So, in a series of congregational meetings, BUUFers gathered to discuss why and how to ensure the future of the fellowship. I remember there being a lot of conversation about BUUF's 'product': Did we know what our product was? Were we proud of our product? What did we tell our friends about BUUF's product? The answers seemed to be 'no', 'no, and 'not too much'. So, a dedicated group began working together to better define BUUF's product—mainly its mission and Sunday Service packaging—and outline some goals to assure BUUF's long term success.

In regards to mission, BUUFers decided to laser focus on just two social justice areas: environmental justice (Green Sanctuary) and LGBTQ+ issues (Welcoming Congregation). Also, we decided to put our UU principles front and center of Sunday Services. We rewrote our mission statement to highlight Green Sanctuary and Welcoming Congregation; invested in solar energy production; joined Emma Kinnard in her Fresh Start Children's Garden; stepped up our commitment to the OutCenter; and posted the UU principles in the sanctuary, courtesy of Rev. Jim and his fabric artistry.

Those steps did a great job of helping us understand why we wanted to preserve BUUF, and helped us improve BUUF's 'product'. We became more mindful about the content of our Sunday Services, from start to finish. But what happened next really started filling the seats on Sundays and, I think, led to BUUF's first ever monthly outing for parents of young children, Parents' Night Out.

Rev. Jim decided to restructure BUUF's Sunday Service and began inviting people to participate in the service in very meaningful ways.

I don't think hearing me say 'Never do alone that what you can do with five other people' was the impetus behind Rev. Jim's Sunday Service initiatives, but it's true that when he began inviting people to help produce the weekly service, the congregation began receiving some spectacular gifts. For the participants: the opportunity to contemplate and really feel the upcoming homily theme. And for the congregation: the opportunity to know fellow congregants more intimately. As they shared with us in music and word we learned about their lives, interests (and talents!), and hopes for our world.

Of course we learn as we go. Some of the feedback that the Committee on Ministry (a liaison between BUUF's congregation and minister) received this year was that sometimes there was too much

participation in Sunday Service. It's true that you can have too much of a good thing. So Rev. Jim scaled back a bit and found a better balance of participation and meditative reflection.

Reviewing notes from the 2015 and 2016 congregational meetings, I considered the many ways we have improved our community, and was reminded of some fun things still left to do: such as re-introduce regular 'Circle Suppers' (small gatherings with food and fellowship) and better define our path to Membership with UU Allcomers (gatherings to help visitors connect with each other and learn about ways to be involved at BUUF). These are more ways to invite participation in our fellowship.

So I think I'll say it again this year: Never do alone that what you can do with five other people. Let this call for inclusion continue as a growth factor for our liberal religious fellowship.

Get involved at BUUF. Ask for help. Meet people. Ask for help. Make friends. Ask for help. Help others. Take charge. Ask for help. Make things happen.

This past year has not been rich with Board actions--and the Board's been slow to launch some new projects (namely a clergy stoles fundraiser and BUUF video)--but it has been a year rich with opportunities for congregant participation, inspiration, belonging, and friendship.

And isn't that the best possible 'product'?

Blessed be. May it be so. Amen, amin, ameen.

Lisa Fuller
President, 2015-2018 (and beyond?)