

SYNOPSIS OF JUUST CHANGE CONSULTANCY, FIRST UU CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO, CA

The JUUST Change Consultancy recently provided services to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, CA. The following is an overview of these experiences.

The consultancy was initiated with an application from the church in April, 2005. The Journey Toward Wholeness (JTW) Committee, along with Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube, RE Director Liz Jones, and a Board member, completed the application.

The JTW Committee had a history of several years of promoting various kinds of training and educational activities for the congregation, and, inspired by the likelihood of a church-wide strategic planning process, hoped to “integrate the AR/AO/MC* transformation vision held by the current leadership into the church-wide governance structure and decision-making processes.”

Mitra Rahnema and Phyllis Daniel were assigned by the UUA’s Lead Consultancy Team to serve as consultants, and began their work in August, 2005. The consultants interviewed by telephone all of those who had been part of the application process, as well as other church staff members and other church members to widen the representation. From these interviews and from the application, they discerned several emergent themes which informed their planning. They prepared a selection of comments from the interviews which seemed to reflect points of interest and import.

A weekend in November was selected for the two-day on-site visit. The schedule included five events:

- A meeting with staff on Friday afternoon, which was designed as a mini-training to provide common language and understanding of the AR/AO/MC work of the church;
- A Friday evening meeting with YAO, now known as Youthful and Open-Minded;
- A Saturday morning meeting of the JTW committee and friends, at which the consultants shared the comments from the interviews and their understanding of the important themes;
- A celebratory lunch for 75, designed and carried out by the JTW committee and the new Ministry Team Council, which had been inspired by the consultants’ early phone interview questions, and at which the Consultancy and the consultants were introduced;
- An afternoon visioning workshop, which was open to the congregation and attended by about thirty persons.

Throughout the weekend, the consultants used small group discussion and sharing of personal experiences, and responses to discussion prompts, to invite the level and depth of conversation which is essential to moving toward deeper commitment, both on individual levels and as a community. The shared comments from the Saturday afternoon workshop on the topics of visioning the AR/AO/MC work of the congregation in the future, and the standards or measures of success, were captured on newsprint, transcribed, and later shared with the congregation in the Consultants' written report.

The Consultancy completed its 28-page report in time for a three-hour joint meeting on January 31, 2006 of the Board of Trustees and the Journey Toward Wholeness Committee. The heart of the report was a section on Findings and Recommendations in nine areas: the importance of celebration, setting goals and standards for success, church organization, the larger community, action and reflection, conflict, training, leadership support and development, and some "cutting edge" areas of growth. The offer was made to provide resources in these areas if requested.

In addition, the report contains a summary of evaluations from the various on-site events. Appendices include a transcription of comments from the visioning, transcribed evaluations, and an excellent article.

*Anti-racist/Anti-oppression/Multicultural