

Annual Stewardship Drive Status Check

Delivered to the Boise UU Fellowship

By Debra Smith

Sunday, March 20, 2011

As president of your board, I am supposed to use this opportunity to apprise you of the status of our Annual Stewardship Drive. I'm not going to do this: suffice it to say that we are on track to meet our budget needs, **IF YOU FILL OUT AND RETURN YOUR PLEDGE FORMS.**

So instead, as president of your board, I've been looking at models for dynamic churches to help create a vision of what we might aspire to. I've learned to look for what's called "best practices," and I've found a church that's near here, but not so near that you can get there on Sunday morning.

Like us, this church donates a portion of their plate offering to a non-profit in the community whose values they support. Unlike us, they develop this further: their social action team invites those 12 groups to come to the church and present how they used the monies they received, and then they make a pitch for how their organization and the church could leverage each other's support. Their plans call for commitments from 2-5 years. Theirs is a new model for philanthropy: social action partnering and leveraging. To make a *substantial* change in the world. Part of their church mission, like our own, states that they want to "heal the world."

Their social action team narrows the group of 12 down to a selection of 3, and these 3 present their plans to members of the congregation at their annual meeting. So instead of just voting on budgets and by-laws and board members, this church votes on its mission and its identity. They commit to see the partnership through to the end of the endeavor.

The first group they adopted was an urban garden program that works in an inner city elementary school with a high refugee population. The school already has a community garden established with help from an urban garden program, and they have a relationship with a refugee settlement organization. Their initiative took many forms:

- The youth group tutored the elementary kids in the school in reading, math and English.
- So the refugee children are able to take part in the dignity of giving, they taught the youth group how to make crafts from their native lands, and the youth sell these at church events, and local festivals around town.
- The church building and grounds committee gives advice on gardening, and shares gardening equipment, and swaps seeds
- In the fall, they host a joint fund raiser—an international harvest dinner that raises funds and awareness for the school, the refugees, the urban gardening initiative and the church.
- The young adult group—tech savvy and professional—helps them with marketing to the local farmer's market, teaches them to do profit and loss statements, and they join together in the fall and spring for beer-brewing. The beer is sold at the fall harvest dinner.
- The adult Sunday school committee (Adult R.E.) was taught about the issue of child soldiers in the Sudan, and then worked on an initiative that was adopted by their national denomination, which then put pressure on the U.N. to embrace an Amnesty Intl. campaign to identify and re-educate these lost children.

- The senior high group “adopted” two boys from the Sudan who ended up in juvenile detention, and they write a letter to them each week. The youth pastor says they are struggling to figure out how to contribute to the project.
- The teens thought about helping the young men write college entrance essays. Their suggestion was met with less than enthusiasm, and now they are learning about the “fit” of this mission. They are learning valuable lessons about privilege and disadvantage with regards to the American Dream and refugees today.
- The worship committee schedules a sermon every other month for the 3 year period on issues that have come out of the experience. Some of these include: *Urban Gardens—a policy for the country*; *“Frankenfoods” and Ethical Stewardship of the Earth*; *Refugees and the American Dream*; *Women’s Rights and Restrictive Religions*; *Comparative Ritual—why their rituals are not all that strange*; *Poetry and Song from People Denied a Voice*.
- The financial affairs committee used their expertise to set up a small micro-finance engine that takes donations from its website and gives as grants to refugees. Six women and two men have received grants from \$500-\$2000. Two women from Bosnia leveraged their \$1000 to buy 4 sewing machines and they employ 7 women making headscarves that they sell on the internet. Last year they made \$7000 after expenses.
- They give 2% of the profits back to the fund.
- So that the refugees have a chance to make a contribution and enjoy the dignity of giving, 4 times each year, the Music Committee arranges for this group to bring the music of their countries to the church for music during the service.
- Once each year the church sponsors an International music festival.
- Last year it brought in \$6800, and attendance at the church continues to rise from this event.

Meanwhile, the church continues to donate to the plate each week and the social action group continues to look for other partnerships they can develop. This church’s identity became all about leveraging and partnering to heal the world. **Their mission statement jumped off the page and made its way into the world.**

When I left off talking with them, they were keen on partnering with a group that assists single parents navigate the “culture of school,” and the increasing demands placed on them to help their children succeed. This community group has a pretty successful model that teaches everything about negotiating the demands of school: keeping track of forms that come home from school; helping keep the child organized; teaching literacy; teaching the importance of nursery rhymes; navigating the web; and navigating college applications and financial aid. The social action team is already thinking about ways to help them “scale up” this model and to go national. They anticipate a 2 year commitment.

I investigated this church for about 6 months, and you probably want to know where it is and what it’s called.

It’s called the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship circa 2020.

It was founded a long time ago, but it really took off in 2011, after a successful Annual Stewardship Drive that exceeded expectations.