

What is the “New Stewardship” at UUCL?

In the fall of 2010 a task force of members under the leadership of Rev. Tricia Hart worked for three months to examine the ministry of stewardship at UUCL and decide what changes, if any, would strengthen it.

The task force generated a set of Principles for Healthy Stewardship to guide their work and evaluate various proposals for how stewardship should be conducted. These principles are:

1. Every member of UUCL is both a “customer” and an “owner”. We are customers because we receive services, such as Sunday morning worship, religious education classes for their children, and the newsletter. We are owners because we are literally the legal owners of UUCL, and we make decisions about the future of the church at congregational meetings and as lay leaders. When we talk about stewardship, we are not talking to members in their role as customers. We are not asking if Sunday worship was a good value this month or whether we “exceeded their expectations” with our hospitality. Instead, we are talking to members in their role as owners. We are asking how to best meet our mission and vision. We are asking how each member can contribute to our success as a religious institution. In short, we do not want members to view stewardship as “payment for services”; instead, we want members to see stewardship as a commitment to build a healthy religious community in Lancaster, even if they didn't like last Sunday's sermon.
2. For each member of UUCL, there is a contribution amount that is both affordable and represents a serious commitment. One of the goals of a stewardship ministry is to help each member find that number. We don't want members contributing more than they can afford; that isn't sustainable or healthy. We also don't want members contributing far less than they can afford because that shows a low level of commitment, and the existence of our institution depends on the commitment of our members. Some members already know “their number”, and that's fine. Other members need information, such as the balanced giving guide and statistics like the median gift amount, to help them find a place on the scale of giving that is affordable and demonstrates their commitment.
3. Commitment follows involvement. The more a member becomes involved with the programs of UUCL, the more their commitment will grow. The ministry of stewardship must encourage members to become more involved.
4. Some gifts are important because they are big and help balance the budget. Other gifts are important because they are numerous and in addition to helping balance the budget they demonstrate to ourselves and the outside world that we are a broad, committed religious community. Stewardship is about both balancing the budget and demonstrating commitment to this institution. We need to make sure that every member understands the importance of their gift, regardless of size, and pay attention to givers at all levels.
5. In order for stewardship to acquire the positive attributes that we are promoting, such as demonstrating commitment and being affordable for all members, we must nurture a sense of pride and satisfaction with being a good steward. This means calling attention to stewardship throughout the year, not as a plea for money, but as a reminder that we are stewards and we should be proud of what we are doing. It means openly and joyfully recognizing the importance of stewardship in each program and special activity.

6. Human and financial resources are precious. Our stewardship program must not depend on large numbers of volunteer leaders or expensive technology or hundreds of hours of professional staff time, nor should it ask our members to make substantial time in their schedules for stewardship activities.
7. Our Stewardship program needs the consistency and support that can only come from professional leadership. Stewardship is such an important ministry that the leadership should come from one of our ministers.
8. Different people are motivated to give by different things. Different people prefer to make their gifts in different ways. We need to appeal to a variety of motivations and provide a variety of avenues for giving.
9. Our children are our future, and if we want a secure future we need to include stewardship in religious education perhaps starting in second grade. The goals of stewardship education are similar to the goals of sexuality education: to remove the stigma through openness and factual information, and to develop healthy attitudes and behaviors. Obviously, we don't expect to develop a curriculum that compares with OWL, but a few age-appropriate lessons at each grade level would be quite reasonable. It is also reasonable to include the Youth Group in stewardship activities.
10. Our tenth principle is that everyone needs to be part of the conversation. It is not OK to opt out. Despite what others may say, this is not the church of anything goes. Practicing liberal religion is at least as demanding as more dogmatic faiths. We believe that talking about stewardship one-on-one or in a small group every year or two is a necessary condition for the health of this church and for our own development as members of a religious community.