

*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. –John 14:12-14*

Greetings members and friends of Bainbridge Community UCC,

I pray this message finds you well.

Things are getting fun. Last Sunday after church the off going and current Central Planning Board members held our 3rd annual Central Planning Board retreat. We gathered to help new members transition onto the Board or into a new role and to engage in open discussion around where the church is and where we envision it heading. It was a wonderful and Spirit-led time. I continue to be amazed by the talents and commitment of the members of this congregation.

We didn't just talk amongst ourselves about ourselves, however. We also looked at extensive demographic information for our area. As a church we are called to minister beyond our walls. As a Board we are called to advocate and care for not just for current members, but for those who might someday *become* members as they walk their individual faith journeys. To that end it is important to know how this community is changing, who is in it, and how we can minister in ways that speak to them.

To be sure, we are looking at a large task. Even as we look at ministries that are new and exciting but still struggling to get the word out. We spoke about the incredible work people did building this church door-to-door, one relationship at a time, particularly Rick Payne. We also talked about how different the world is and that door-to-door wouldn't work today. In fact, today's version of door-to-door ministry is social media. With social media people can get a glimpse inside the church before actually coming. They can begin to know our values, our work, and our understanding of faith, community, and God. One of the things that stood out in looking at the demographic results was that, of the people who identified as "outside the church" in this area, 61% said they don't participate in religious life because religious people are "too judgmental" and 51% said it was because faith communities held "strict/inflexible beliefs." And, the fastest growing religious group in this area is "none." These are people I believe our church has a message for.

We also found that people in this area are looking for opportunities to support issues they believe in. We found people value care for the environment, altruism, personal growth, and broadening their horizons. However, there also seems to be a relatively low sense of wellbeing. These are all things I believe we can speak to.

When we speak about growing the church, what's important is the "why" we want to grow it. If we're trying to grow the church because we want things to stay relatively the same but be more financially stable and with a few more people on Sunday morning, that will come through in our actions and we won't accomplish much. However, if growing the church is simply the result of the fact that we believe we have a message for people that religion is different than some might think, God is loving and grace-filled, we provide opportunities to volunteer to help our fellow people, and there is untold peace available in one's relationship with God? If we are reaching out to people in ways and times that are convenient and in ways they can understand even if they weren't raised in a church? Then we can do miraculous things.

Growth doesn't happen when we're trying to meet our own needs. Growth is simply a byproduct of meeting the needs of our community. That, is how we are fed, by feeding others. That is what I see in our future. So, I ask you to pray and to dream. What do you think is the message we have to share? What words would you use to describe us or describe who we aspire to be? What words would you use to convey the message we have to share with our community? We are gathering them so we can begin getting the word out in eye-catching and bold ways. We need people to know we are here and we have a message they need to hear!

May God lead us in our discernment of those needs and bold witness to God's inclusive and extravagant love. And may God's grace and peace be with you all,



Pastor Shaun