

10/18/09 Sermon

"The Path to Purpose"

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

The Rev. Dan Hotchkiss asked a key question vital to our search for purpose – *"Who owns the congregation?"*

Most of us, I think, would answer, "The congregation, represented by the Board."

Hotchkiss proposes something radically different. He contends that *"the owner of the congregation is the mission,"* and that we exist as a community to serve that mission.

The measure of our success as a faith community will be how we infuse the breath of life into that mission, and whether we are willing to forgo a sense of individual entitlement to the needs broader community. Our mission must not negate our individuality. It must enhance our sense of community, meaning and a sense of transformative hope. Through this process, we will move beyond just being volunteers into becoming servant ministers to the body of our shared faith.

The key element of a mission is how lives are transformed – personally – within this sacred community and in the broader world. The mission we will develop must call us to heal a broken world with a laser-like focus on the dispossessed in need of love and justice. We also are called to remain open to recognizing and celebrating the signs of hope in our midst.

Peter Drucker asks, *"Whose lives do we intend to change in what way? A congregation that limits its vision to pleasing its members falls sort of its true purpose."*

All of the work that we do to build and grow this congregation is diminished unless we can positively transform the lives of people touched by the congregation.

Pleasing members and friends alone is unworthy of us and too narrow and self-serving. Our goal must be to change lives and people's focus – to draw them out of narrow self-interest and bend them instead to the cause of justice and the work of transformation: spiritually, socially, relationally.

The Board and I serve to provide leadership in this task of transformation, but the broader responsibility belongs to you – to find the mission that

captures your allegiance. That mission is the real owner for whose benefit we hold and deploy the congregation's resources.

With so much going on – the possibility of alternative services, the final adoption of our congregational covenant, the path we are walking to becoming a successful program-driven church, and so much more – why are we continuing to add issues to our already full plate?

The answer is obvious, but the process is longer and more thoughtful. We are not the same church we were even four years ago. New people have become members and friends, and others have left. With new people, a new understanding of ourselves and our purpose is emerging. It is time once again to look at ourselves in the mirror, adjust our mission, do a "makeover" that better reflects our hopes and aspirations of who we want to be. It is time to give up on self-doubt that has stymied growth, development and transformation.

We have a job to do – to heal the world and ourselves. There is no reason to fear or be wary of this process of transformation. We have shown throughout UUMAN's history that we can succeed in becoming a more holistic community if we but gather our spirit and marshal our considerable strengths.

As our own David Hudson wrote, *"We believe we are better prepared than we have ever been to make a successful transition."* So let's get going.

Our creative process has the goal of being intentionally transparent, educational and inclusive – involving the congregation in every step of this new and exciting endeavor.

Spearheaded by the Committee on Ministries of the church, we have begun this spiritual quest to renew and expand our religious purpose – to re-imagine who we are as a people of faith in the world – to reshape the future.

Let me be clear, there is loss as well as significant gain in this transformation. Our focus will shift from community as the center of our religious life to our mission. It is safe to say that a community whose driving force is the goal of mutual transformation is far more profound and far stronger than being a community that exists as an end in itself. (*Robert Latham, adp.—"Moving On from Church Folly Lane."*)

This growth process calls us to change our mindset from being a social community with a goal of creating social justice/action organization, into a religious organization with spiritual goals of universal human transformation.

Kate Hudson put it beautifully: We must change our mindset from one of:

- Personal fulfillment to personal transformational growth;
- Small is beautiful to big is powerful and [far more influential];
- Affirming to challenging;
- From a focus on intimacy to focus on transformation;
- We must shift from self-serving reflection to worldwide transformation;
- Must replace community as the goal of our mission to community as the outcome of our mission.

Yes, all this pushes us out of our comfort zone from the small and familiar to the larger community that will be both challenging and soul nourishing. Our small ministry group, committees, adult enrichment programs and many other activities will serve to keep us united and connected as we expand to a world view that a new mission will lead us to.

If you have any doubts to that truth, just ask someone who participates in these activities how they feel about their involvement. Ask the people who share their lives in our "Evensong" group or new member spirituality group. You will find, I believe, that we don't lose who we are, so much as transform and expand our religious horizons as we focus on engaging the wider world.

We must find a new vision of ourselves, a broader dream of who and what we want to be in 50 or 100 years. Those dreams will lead to concrete plans for the future, beginning with a new UUMAN mission. This will be a statement of who we are, what we value and want to stand for in a year and five years from now, larger and bolder than we currently are.

Remember, as scriptures tell us, that without a vision the people perish (*Proverbs*). You will create this mission – the paving stone to a broader vision of transformation and service. The impetus is here, the seeds of change are sprouting.

Now is the time to be, to do and to forge a new and transformative future.

May it be so!