

Overview of the Planting Team Start
WellSprings Congregation
Rev. Ken Beldon

The WellSprings Planting Team was selected to set a solid foundation for the future growth of the congregation: to be the first, strong cell in what will eventually become a multi-celled, integrally related church body. The members were selected because of their desire to see UU grow, to try new approaches to achieving that expansion, but, most importantly, because they themselves sought greater spiritual growth, and perceived that the transformational power of authentic religious experience is the one essential ingredient in building a vibrant religious community.

The form of the initial gathering for the Planting Team follows the above function. We began, not as a group of planners, designating what needed to be done right away, but more as a group of pilgrims, gathered to share a sacred journey together. We started not with Lenin's question of "What is to be done?" But instead, "Why are we here gathered?" We focused on the deeper, identity based questions of "Why?" and "Who?", rather than the more tangible, resource based questions of "How?" and "What?" We're aware of the importance of those latter questions, but I believe they are secondary to questions of identity, purpose and vision. I believe that if we had started with the more tangible questions, the more established UU's on the Planting Team would have naturally fallen back upon the experience they already possessed, and the unchurched seekers on the Team would have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the task before them or sought after more secular models of success that the larger culture presents.

To achieve the above orientation, I lead the Planting Team through a nine-week course I've developed called "Listening to Our Lives". The sessions were focused around the core experiences and issues in spiritual life: our sources of inspiration, resources to deal with suffering and gain insight through difficult times, our ability to discern our gifts and passions and channel these into disciplines, our experiences of beloved community, the ways in which mortality shapes our sense of meaning, our relationship to the experience of God and the Divine, and what salvation and wholeness of life means to us. The sessions took a "show, not tell" approach to spiritual growth. As the Planting Team is called together to create a community that will offer hope and transformation to its members, I wanted them to know that from within their own experience as the first cell of WellSprings.

As a product of the process, the Planters have covenanted with each other, learning to trust each other with the significant sorrows, struggles and celebrations of their lives. Such sharing is an intrinsic good; but the by-product of their trust will be an ability to work diligently and discerningly with each other, as we now move into the DNA development phase of our work when we will articulate the core purposes and values that animate WellSprings.

At the conclusion of the nine weeks, members of the Planting Team described their experience in various terms of re-awakening, re-birth, and re-membering—of having a renewed, or newly found, capacity for spiritual growth and authentic personal and interpersonal experiences. They are ready, with enthusiasm, for the next steps of building this religious community. I believe the first cornerstone of WellSprings has been firmly set.