

Minister's Annual Report to the Congregation

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Tapestry, a Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Mission Viejo, California

June 11, 2006

I have never been more proud to serve this congregation than during this, our fourth year of shared ministry: for me the busiest year so far. We have strengthened institutionally, broadened our outreach, and begun to plan seriously for our future.

I'd love to follow Lynn's report by also focusing on the accomplishments of the past year, including our congregation's

- 1st comprehensive plan;
- 1st face-to-face canvass;
- 1st five-year pro forma budget;
- Name change that impressed our denominational president;
- Expanded social action outreach;
- Expanded Adult Religious education, via our new Affiliated Community Minister (see her report).
- Expanded publicity: the past year our congregation has made positive appearances in local magazines, radio, and TV, and has made eight, count them eight, positive appearances in the *Orange County Register*, with the next coming up on July 1.

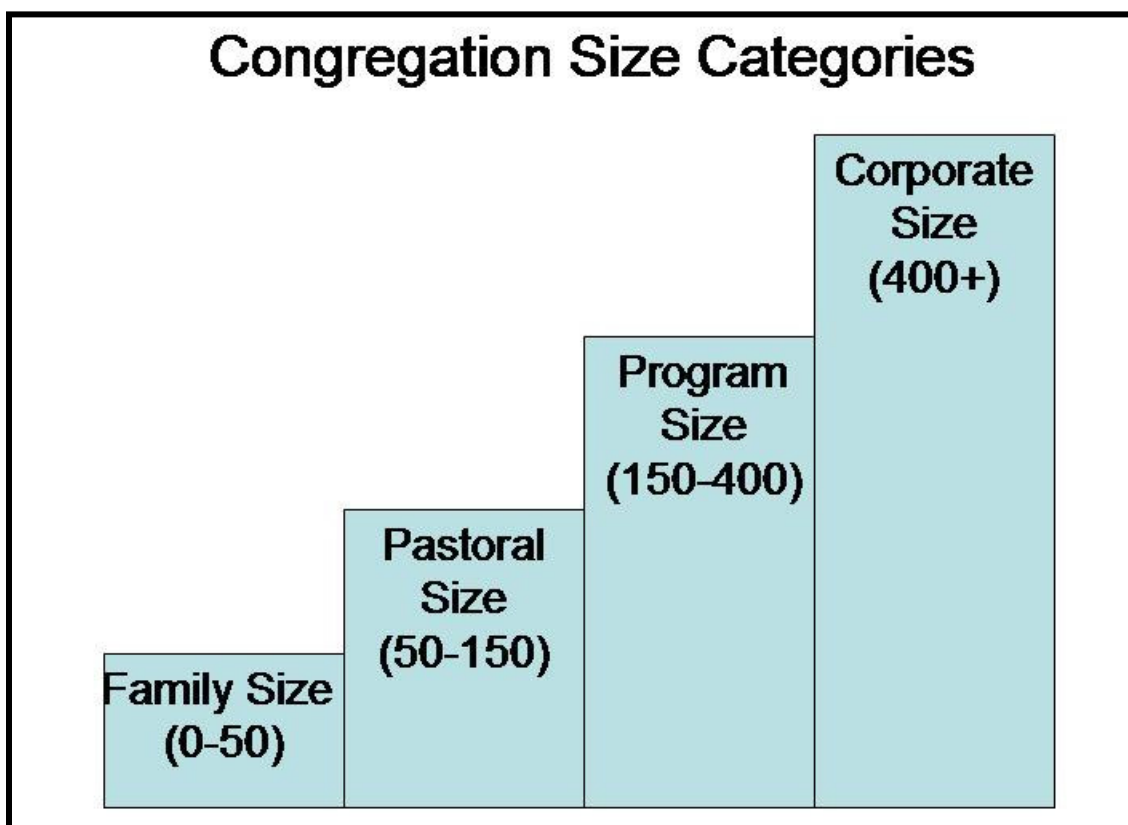
More importantly, I'd like to honor all of us for personally supporting each other through life's transitions, joyous and painful—births, weddings, deaths, not to mention ongoing war. Our congregational life has continued unabated, doing what it does best: comforting us when we are afflicted and afflicting us when we have gotten too comfortable.

But we don't have the luxury of just focusing on our tidy past. We need to focus on weaving our future. You know, this congregation is close to double the size it was when I first arrived four years ago. There are a lot more people here, with a lot more going on. It's not surprising that I now routinely work twelve to fourteen hours a day, as I keep taking on new responsibilities without dropping any of the old. So believe me when I say that I'm thrilled about the historic moment approaching this fall, when we go from one staff member at Tapestry, to three.

But in order to keep moving forward, we must understand that challenges Tapestry faces right now are unlike any it has ever faced before. Not only are we a different congregation than we were four years ago, we're a different *type* of congregation. I want to share some ideas with you from Alice Mann, one of the most respected congregational consultants in the country. According to Mann,

- Congregations fall into distinctive size categories, and congregations of different sizes organize in different ways. Each has its own recognizable way of “being church.”
- Congregations do not grow or decline smoothly, but tend to “plateau” at certain predictable levels of attendance (one is the 150-200 range).
- In order to break through an attendance plateau, a congregation must deliberately relinquish familiar patterns of behavior and begin to act as larger congregations act.

So what are the size categories? The following chart explains:



Mann defines the Pastoral size, the size we are leaving behind, as

“A coalition of two or three family and friendship networks unified around the person and role of the pastor. Clergy time is largely taken up maintaining a direct pastoral relationship with each member, coordinating the work of a small leadership circle, personally conducting worship, and leading small-group programs...The governing board usually operates like a committee, arranging much of the day-to-day life of the congregation. Members recognize each other’s

faces, know most people's names, and will notice if someone new is present at worship.”

What about Program, the size we are becoming? Mann writes,

“Known for the quality and variety of its programs. Separate programs for children, youth, couples, seniors, and other age and interest groups provide entry points for a wide range of people. The pastor's crucial role is to recruit, equip, and inspire key program leaders—lay and ordained, paid and unpaid. This ring of leadership might include, for example, the choir director, the [Director of Religious Education], the youth group leader, the coordinator of lay visitors, and the head of a committee that tracks new member incorporation. Working as a team with the pastor, they reach out to involve others as program participants and as leaders. Decision making is broadly distributed within the wider leadership circle (perhaps 50 people) and pastoral care is shared by the laity.”

Finally, she notes,

“In program- and corporate-size churches...the variety and complexity of relationships require conscious attention to matters of identity, purpose, structure, role of leaders, and so on. Neither the members nor the pastor can intuitively grasp the wholeness of the system. The larger membership and the rich variety of programming will only cohere well if leaders ‘construct’ a clear identity for the church and express it consciously in a mission statement, a vision, or a strategic plan. For newcomers raised in a smaller church, this work of construction may seem taxing and bureaucratic. On the other hand, the intentionality of the larger congregation might stimulate their imagination about church life, clarify their reasons for participating, and provide rich networks of growth, friendship, and ministry.”

Mann would say that this fall, Tapestry has been handed a gift on a golden platter, an opportunity to break out of our plateau. But receiving the gift will require strengthening institutionally, and stepping up to the challenges we now face. Two in particular stand out. If we meet them both, we have the potential to grow like never before. What are they?

1. Broadening congregational leadership. You're here at this annual meeting because you believe in the vision of this congregation, you believe in the importance of UUism in South Orange County. We heard in Lynn's report that many members of this congregation are already involved in leadership. Those of you who can step up to greater leadership, you are needed. But even more importantly, we need to consider the members and friends of Tapestry who are not in this room. As we strengthen our institution, we need to invite them into a greater understanding of service. As we grow into a program-sized congregation in structure as well as numbers, those of us who are already leading must reach out to others and involve them as partners in realizing our shared vision.

2. Working hard in the next two months to welcome newcomers. As you know, we've been made the beneficiary of a UUA publicity campaign--the UUA will spend close to \$100,000 to increase awareness of UUism in Orange County, using billboards, radio spots, four-page inserts in newspapers. That's going to drive lots of newcomers to our doors. What happens when they walk inside? Will newcomers perceive that Tapestry might be the spiritual home they have been seeking? If so, how? What are we doing to make clear all that Tapestry has to offer? How do we not miss this opportunity? That's a question we need to answer not only with our heads, but with our hands, during the next two months.

So you see, next year is a big year for us, a year of taking our vision in both hands and running with it. And in order for next year to be a big year, all hands are needed in the next two months.

Now, I'd like to end on a personal note. Next year is not only a big year for me professionally, but personally. I'm getting married! And though the wedding will be down south near my parents' home, Sarah and I wanted to have a way to celebrate with you as well. We are planning a simple reception for Tapestry, most likely on November 5. I'll keep you informed. I'm excited that we'll be able to celebrate together.

I'll conclude by saying that I love who we are now as a congregation, and am enthusiastic about our growing vision of who we want to become. It is a privilege to weave my life with yours in this ever-growing Tapestry, and I look forward to the next year of our shared ministry with **great** anticipation.

Yours in faith,

John