

FAITH IN ACTION – ACTION PLANS

Dave Dustin, Tom Kinney, & Mike Knez
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock
Presented June 1, 2014

Bulletin Quotes:

Generational Poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief system (that trap the children in poverty). ...it is the responsibility of educators and others who work with the poor to teach the differences and skills/rules that will allow the individual to make the choice. As it now stands for many of the poor, the choice never exists. --"The Framework for Understanding Poverty," Dr. Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.

It should be your care, therefore, and mine, to elevate the minds of the children and...to excite in them an ambition to excel in every capacity, faculty, and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep in infancy, they will grovel all their lives. --John Adams, 1765

Story For All Ages:

Not very long ago and not very far away, some people in somebody's living room were talking about things. All these people came from different occupations. One couple could speak Russian and had worked for the government overseas as spies. Another person worked to help old people and poor people. Another was a business manager and had lived in Europe. Another person gave massages to people that made them feel better. Another was in engineering in different parts of the world designing big things. Another was an attorney that helped businesses get organized. And the leader was a minister with good ideas, a man who had had a brain tumor removed that made him talk and walk with difficulty and with a big dog trained to help him, a dog just like some blind people have. Quite a mix of people and a big dog to fit in one small living room, don't you think?

The thing these people had in common was that they thought all people should be respected, all religions are important, and all of us should work to make life better for all people. Some had come from groups elsewhere who thought and did those things.

This group of people said to themselves, they could organize a church. They could make some place of their own where people can come together to hug, be friends, share ideas, and help one another. And they could somehow make our community better.

There were some who thought it's too difficult for our small group to make a church, but this group of people did that difficult thing anyway. And more people came and the group got stronger.

Then this group of people who met in the living room plus those who had joined had grown needing to meet in other group's bigger rooms elsewhere. They remembered their previous idea about a place of their own where people can come together to hug, be friends, share ideas and help one another.

Some thought it's too difficult for our small group to build a church building like that, but this group of people did that difficult thing anyway. Can you all say that together: "But this group of people did that difficult thing anyway." And more people came and the group got stronger.

Then this group of people who met in the living room plus the bigger group that had joined remembered the idea that they could somehow make a major, long-lasting change in our community to make it better. They studied what the community needed and how to go about that change to make the community better for everyone.

Some thought it's too difficult for our small group to make a major, long-lasting change to make our community better, but this group of people did that difficult thing anyway. And more people came, the group got stronger, and the community got better.

How come this very small group of people were able to do these difficult things of creating a church, building a church building, and making a lasting change for the better in their community? Because they tried. And what would have guaranteed that they would have failed in these three difficult tasks? If they would have never tried. Yes, the shortest path to failure to do important but difficult things is if you never try.

Reading:

The authors of this morning's readings are our own members.

From March, 2002, the first author is Ann Kelsey summarizing the Vision and Planning Leadership Retreat for the congregation that structured our first five-year action plan.

Ann recorded that we wish to be "Community focused, as opposed to state or national, and have a Community Service Project that we have adopted that is on-going—our niche.

The Vision Committee will address our role in the larger community in a long range plan.”

Next is April, 2007 by Bob Weekley as Chair of the Vision and Planning Committee quoting the new five-year plan. “To serve the needs of our community—find a UUFR service niche in our community.” Bob must have been stuck in the Vision and Planning job prior to his becoming our longest serving president as here are his words as Vision and Planning Chair in the annual report to the Congregation December, 2008, “Everyone is encouraged to look at the ideas on the list, consider ideas that may not be listed yet, then be ready to engage in congregational discussion and decision-making.” He then goes on to report congregational responses like “Focus on one main community outreach program. Example: ‘Oh, that’s the group that is concerned about environmental issues—they really attacked that program in a big way.’ Another of the 20 responses was a ‘Social justice agenda (to) build bridges to attack the racial divide in the community’.”

Next, it was my turn in May, 2012 as Chair of Vision and Planning to summarize the new 2013-2018 Five-year plan that was distributed to all members. “Determine and implement our UUFR community service / social justice area niche (later renamed Faith In Action niche) following a set of progress benchmarks.” (We have successfully completed the first four Faith in Action progress benchmarks on study and research and are on number 5 today, congregational decision on action plan.)

This last piece was written in 2022, author yet to be determined. You may recognize it as coming from our 2012 document stating our vision of UUFR 10 years into the future imagined by our Board: “By 2022, our niche has not only been determined but we are beginning to realize our first successes and are considering expanding our reach. We have leveraged our resources...such that UUFR is the “go to” organization leading this action to make a lasting difference for the better in our community...the children entering the program in 2014 have grown to the point that 1-on-1 mentoring has been added and has now become a reality.”

Main Talk:

Initial Segment:

Today’s talk will be in four five-minute segments followed by questions, discussion, and a vote. Get your buzzer buttons at the ready in case our passions drive our presenters into overtime. I’ve been designated to start and be the first to face your buzzers.

In November of 2012, our congregation chose as our Faith In Action niche to help the children trapped in generational poverty through early preschool for 3-year-olds and second, to free those youngsters from hunger and nutritional deprivation. We had asked that you choose ONE from the list of many niche proposals that you generated, you picked TWO and were told to figure out how to do both. I’ve worked for folks like you before.

More than 24 months ago, the 24 members who indicated on their UUFR Skills and Interests inventory questionnaire their enthusiasm for community service and social justice were invited to a series of meetings to begin researching these two areas. Through this broad sharing of ideas and enthusiasms of the early gatherings, our focus was and continues to be on the children. Subsequent gatherings were in a much smaller group facilitated by Kristi. We knew we needed to know, simply stated, what was it that made it difficult for these generational poverty kids to succeed—poor early learning due to cultural differences. What works and what doesn't—look at the hundreds of studies designed to figure that out. And which of those things would work in our community—some are promising, others have been tried here and failed. And how do we make what works happen—careful planning, good cooperation with willing organizations, and garnering support from everywhere where help is available.

The studies and all the various “experts” vary wildly on what works best and what doesn't work at all. However an organization called the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers sponsored by the Pew Research Organization looked at virtually all of the studies from 1960 on and helped greatly as they, like us, were looking at what made a lasting and measureable difference detectable even when these preschool youngsters were in their 20's, 30's and beyond. The objective is that the generational poverty cycle is broken—the child becomes an adult living in an improved economic condition and is a contributor to society relatively free of the need for interventions from social services or law enforcement. We would like to be among the service organizations

that try hard to work ourselves out of a job. If no children perpetuate generational poverty in our community, we're done.

The best preschool correlation, the biggest factors, of what works in the academic, socialization, and emotional control area is highly qualified teachers (Bachelor's or Masters with expertise in early childhood education) and time spent with that teacher (starting young, full day-long preschool, small class size). In the hunger and nutrition area, reaching the children early on their brain development curve and continuing that emphasis on nutrition through at least four years old.

Your Niche Team has put their heads together and come up with an action plan for each area, the early preschool for 3-year-olds and addressing hunger and nutritional problems for the youngsters. The action plans state how we are going to do this. We are here this morning to present these action plans and solicit your support for putting them into effect. We aren't claiming we have all the answers at this point but have learned more than enough to proceed. There will be unforeseeable challenges that we will need to resolve on the way to success. This is your decision. If you think we are now ready to make this happen and you are a voting member, then please mark your ballot in favor and sign it. If the majority agrees with that "yes", the implementation will begin.

Now here's Mike to present the step by step preschool for 3-year-olds action plan which will be followed by Dave's presentation of the step by step hunger and nutrition action plan: *B-z-z zzzzzzzzzz*.

Second Segment:

Niche Subcommittee Report on Preschool Initiative

June 1, 2014 Mike Knez

Step 1: As there is a need for long term, consistent monetary support for the early childhood education (and nutrition) objectives with the goal of combating generational poverty, we propose to establish a charitable non- profit foundation. It's function will be to manage contributions, to pursue and award grants, and promote research within public and private partnerships. National, regional, and local foundations will be solicited as well as local organizations and willing individuals.

Step 2: Recommended first action is to increase the availability of early preschool for economically needy families in Lancaster County by partnering with Lancaster schools to fund a second preschool class for 3 year olds. Nearly a full additional class of qualified children were identified but were unable to be served last year. It is proposed that the grant would be structured like that set up in 2012 when the Wiley Foundation agreed to fund a preschool for three years olds for a duration of 3 years. Each year there was a decreasing amount of funding with Lancaster schools eventually assuming total financial responsibility. Negotiations would start at a 50-50 cost sharing with a \$40,000 first year grant as it is estimated the total cost for new class would be \$80,000. According to our research there are approximately 35 unserved three year olds who are living in poverty in the county. Lancaster has the greatest percentage of children living in poverty as

measured by the percentage of children in the school system receiving free and reduced lunches.

Step 3: In step 3 we move on to how to encourage early preschools in the other three counties. We will assess which county will be the next best candidate to find partners where we can sponsor an early preschool class based upon need and readiness.

1. In Northumberland there may be an opportunity to partner with NN YMCA or Northumberland schools. The YMCA has no facilities for a preschool. Northumberland schools has 4 half day preschools for 4 year olds with funding through Title I. NN Head Start provides the only free preschool services for children living in poverty in the county. The total estimated number of unserved at risk 3 year olds is 31.
2. In Mathews again there may be an opportunity to partner with Mathews YMCA. They however also have no facilities for a preschool. There are no preschools at Mathews County schools for 3 or 4 years old except those mandated for special needs children. The total estimated unserved three year olds living in poverty in the county is 24.
3. In Middlesex the YMCA has a preschool. They do have low enrollment so there may be possibility of working with them to increase enrollment. They did not provide the breakdown of how many 3 year olds they had attending. The other free provider in the county for 3 year olds is Bridges Head Start whose parent non-profit is the Parent Child Development Corporation. As they give priority to 4 year olds they only served two 3

year olds this year in their classroom at the elementary school. The challenge to establishing an additional early preschool either with the school system or Head Start is finding space. The school system does have preschool for 4 year olds primarily for children with identified educational needs. As we had no numbers on the number of 3 year olds much less those living in poor families enrolled at YMCA we couldn't give estimate of needy children within county not being served. It is known that few are being served.

The chart provided summaries some of what is known in each of the four counties and, county by county, the hurdles to be overcome. On the chart TBN means To Be Negotiated as there is not any private/public partnerships to provide precedent. We can go only so far in our approaching possible partners to research needs and readiness without some basis to proceed. We will not begin any significant kind of negotiation which implies commitment without a vote of support.

Step 4. The 4th step is to recruit an university research team to monitor and study the performance gains of the early preschool children to document the gains made and to establish a continual critique and quality improvement program for our initiatives. This will also provide a strong basis to ask for continued financial support from donors for the long haul.

This is the limit of the action plan we are voting on today. However, as we progress there will be future opportunities that the Fellowship may decide to pursue:

A Word About Future Options:

Since teacher quality has a primary impact on child outcomes, we could also support professional development opportunities for preschool settings as in Head Start, YMCA's, faith-based/private non-profits, or low-profit providers.

To increase incentives to teachers to develop as professionals the foundation could offer stipends to help pay for continuing education for teachers pursuing Associates, Bachelor or Masters Degrees. After earning those degrees in order to help them stay in their positions, noting the low wages for teaching and teaching assistant jobs associated with non-profit and faith based preschools, the foundation could offer monetary prizes for each year up to 3 years they remained with the preschool.

Third Segment:

Meeting the Nutritional Needs of the Pre-natal to 3 year old age group

Niche Report 6-1-2014 David Dustin

Step 1: There are multiple indicators of food related poverty in our area as indicated by the number of people qualifying for SNAP (food stamps), food pantry visits, and other similar programs. Statistics show that, on average, about 25% of children, 17 and under, in our area that are currently living in poverty. Lancaster County has 483 or 27.4% of its children living in poverty, Mathew has 287 or 18%, Northumberland has 559 or 28% and

Middlesex has 397 or 24% living in poverty. Some of the children are, of course, school aged and have access to food in their schools but many are too young to attend school. However only two programs focus on pre-natal through 3 year old nutrition; the federal WIC (Women Infant & Child) program and the state-funded Healthy Families program. WIC provides assistance to low income women, infants, and children up to the age of 5 years old who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. Rural Infant Services Program - Healthy Families - attempts to identify and support young mothers with education and nutritional assistance during their pregnancy and until the child is 3 years old. Both have opportunities for our involvement and can provide us with learning opportunities.

We need to get a better understanding of how each identifies those in need, how each responds to that need, and the opportunities each provide us to become involved with their efforts.

Step 2: After today's meeting, if given the go-ahead, we will go back to these organizations so we can improve our understanding of their programs. We can then come back and share that information with the Fellowship so we can determine which opportunities will allow us to become active in their pre-natal to 3 year old hunger and nutrition programs. Based upon member response, we would negotiate a partnership with the organization that presents the best opportunities for our involvement and whose needs best match our interests and capabilities. Establishing a relationship with either of these two organizations will provide us the needed opportunity to learn more about addressing the hunger and nutrition challenge. We would start slow and gradually become more involved as we learn how we can best help our chosen program.

Step 3: As the Niche Early Preschool becomes a reality, we could then explore how we can apply what we have learned about hunger and nutrition to the families of our early preschool students, especially those with younger siblings. Our action plan may begin with merely providing nutritious snacks in coordination with the school food service system. It can grow to take-home foods like the existing “Backpack” program. We could sponsor a potluck for the parents which would also include a short cooking/nutrition educational program. Sponsoring family doctor visits, helping families with financial planning like how to set up a monthly budget may be other possibilities that would be well appreciated by the families. The message that we care would come through clearly and open opportunities to not only mentor the preschool children but also be available to the younger siblings and their parents leading to one on one personal relationships.

Step 4: We would learn through this activity what works well and what is less productive. That might lead to a more formal program with a longer term commitment approved by the Fellowship that supports the families of those who enroll their 3 year olds in “our” preschool.

This is the limit of the action plan we are voting on today. However, as we progress there may be future opportunities that the Fellowship may decide to pursue.

This graph of brain development vs. age indicates why early nutrition is so important. If there is hunger and /or nutritional deficiencies, the child’s brain does not develop correctly and the child is burdened for life. During this growth period, the brain creates

many neural circuits but prunes out functions that are not used. So, if a child isn't read to or spoken to very much in the first three years of life, their brain will "prune" neural circuits necessary for developing these skills leaving the child with lifelong reading and speaking disabilities.

We have learned some guidelines and, in some cases, received strong advice from other programs, some successful and others not so. It is appropriate that we share some of this advice as it helps the Fellowship understand our thinking.

We have been cautioned against "entanglements" with existing organizations or groups of existing organizations.

For example, state-funded Smart Beginnings ran into issues where the state government pressed them to critique the quality of the Head Start programs in the area. Their response was to sever their connection to the state. What may sound like a good idea in an urban area with many competing Head Start schools is not a good idea when there is only one Head Start operating in each county.

A second example comes from Smart Beginnings where they were assigned coordinating activities among the various state and federal children's services efforts. The competition for children and funds between the various providers frustrated Smart Beginnings and eventually they were seen as just one more organization funded by the same government sources at the possible expense of the organizations they were assigned to coordinate.

A final example of this caution that has gone into our research and planning is the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) which provides funding for qualified locations to feed children during the summer months. Federal resources are available for sponsors who want to provide food for children during summer months. This program is heavily

regulated and sponsor sites must attend training sessions before they are authorized to provide food for children.

These sponsor sites are also subject to frequent inspections to insure they are administering the SFSP properly. If they are found to be in violation of regulations the sponsor site can be fined.

WIC and Healthy families is not immune from their own problems. WIC seems to suffer from being over regulated and has limited funding which seems to have led to a decrease in enrollment. A recent article speculates that because of these stringent regulations, one of which requires that the mother re-qualify for the program every 6 months after their child reaches one year old, mothers are forgoing the WIC pre-natal and infant care and nutrition education aspects of WIC and moving to the SNAP program where funds are, essentially, unlimited and the requirements for enrollment less stringent.

It is imperative that such advice against entanglements be shared with the Fellowship and that it be recognized that the team has factored these cautions into the action plans that are being proposed.

Final Segment:

Tom-- At no time has the Niche Team seen its efforts as the only thing the Faith In Action program does. It's just the one with the longer term goal of a permanent change for the better in our community. We have other programs going now that are expected to

continue and there are other ideas various members would like to support. For example, Elaine has been talking about supplying a book a month to at-risk youngsters similar to the Dolly Parton' "Imagination Library." Thea has looked into the Wounded Warriors. Eve has talked about raising the nutritional level of the backpack program for older kids. Anyone can champion a Faith In Action activity, get it organized, recruit support, and make good things happen.

So what will happen if you vote today that the action plans for the Niche program, early preschool and improved nutrition for the very young targeting at an end to generational poverty, should go forward:

On the preschool side, we will meet with the Lancaster school leadership to confirm they would be willing and ready to go forward with a second 3 year old preschool class. On the nutrition side, we will immediately meet with the WIC people and with the Healthy Family People to see what kind of relationship would work best for all. That relationship once determined will likely spawn all kinds of opportunities to grow stronger and smarter kids. Then we would establish a non-profit foundation or some kind of donor advised entity with the pro-bono help of attorneys and a CPA. Recruit volunteers within and outside the Fellowship to begin applying for grants and making contacts to add to the over \$20,000 that has already been donated for the Niche program. Let's target major foundations. One of you can copy the list of donors that PBS News Hour puts on the screen each evening. Letters need to go to them. Some foundations focus upon innovative efforts toward children's education. Fore example, we could contact Will Miller, head of New York's Wallace Foundation. Others focus on the Tidewater Virginia's health and education issues such as the Jessie Ball DuPont Foundation. Even

the Steamboat Museum publishes a list of donors—get a copy to our funding team. In a Wiley Foundation meeting two weeks ago, we were steered to Bill Warren who shares an enthusiasm for supporting educational improvements and early preschool in particular. You might know that Bill is the person who raised \$600,000 to add to a Virginia Housing Development Authority grant of \$1.3 million that resulted in the construction of the Mercer Place housing development in Kilmarnock supplying affordable quality housing for our area teachers. If we are ready to go with this action plan, Bill may join our team. A Foundation website and brochure might be needed. It should be clear that our focus is on the kids but teachers can't be paid with another round of Kumbaya. Funds are needed and each of you can help one way or another.

Another element of the path forward is hooking up with a recognized university to study the efficacy of our program, provide us feedback for improvement, and contribute to the data set of what works and what doesn't. We have talked with Dr. Amanda Williford at UVA and will explore the level of interest at William and Mary as well. Some of you might remember the monthly *Bricks and Mortar* column in *The Chalice* that kept the entire Fellowship up to date on the progress of our building construction. The Niche deserves a similar communication link as we move forward. One of you can write that. Everybody can be a part of moving the program forward. Let's develop a long list of funding opportunities—people, organizations, and activities. But first a word of caution. Nobody likes a braggart so we don't want to be talking about all the great things we've done or the great things we are about to do. It's best to stay low key as we put the program together and gather the needed finances. We need to bide our time until the

program is up and successful and we have something substantive to build upon as we expand to other counties. And we certainly don't want our theology to become a major factor governing the extent of our support.

That said, we need everyone's help to do something about that name, our Niche. We know what we mean but others won't have a clue. Besides, it's self-centered. We need a name for the program that communicates opportunity for the youngsters, inspires the donors, and encourages parents to strive to enroll their children. *Early Preschool of the Rappahannock* is too long. *Smart Beginnings* comes with too much baggage. *End Generational Poverty* is on the mark but doesn't even hint at the path. *Our Children, Our Future*—enhe. *Dreams Come True* gets abbreviated to DCT which sounds like an insecticide. *Early Start* but that's a premature baby, isn't it? *Opportunity School* came from Pirkkko and is one we can have fun with as our kids could be signed up for Special Ops. EP squared (early preschool, end poverty). EP cubed (adds Eat Properly). We have a room full of wordsmiths here that I'm sure will come through with lots of proposals.

So let's open the floor to program names, ideas, comments, questions that Mike, Dave, and I will do our best to answer and then we can vote by marking your ballots. Please include your name on the card—no photo I.D. required. Bzzz-zz-z-z