**Reaching New People (RNP) Steering Committee**

This past winter Bob Kottkamp contacted me to tell me about a workshop being offered by the Conference, “How to Reach New People”. Churches in the United States are struggling with membership and indeed many churches in Vermont are closing. We have a wonderful church family, but for a number of reasons our numbers are unfortunately shrinking. This workshop sounded like something we needed to check out.

I put together a team consisting of Don Harpster, Ginny and Bob Kottkamp, Fred Marin, and myself. There were almost one hundred people attending the workshop that was held conveniently close in Springfield. It was eye opening to listen to the presenter talk about the challenges facing churches in our country and regrettably the demise of the institution as we know it. We learned that all of the things that we have historically done to try and get new folks to join us in church do not work. We live in a very different world than our ancestors and that requires a very different approach to attract people to church. If we continue to do the same thing, we will get the same results and our church will continue to shrink.

The workshop was stimulating and those who attended were filled with hope that there was something they could do to revitalize and grow their churches. We learned that there is no one singular thing that works universally. We learned of a process that we could use to develop strategies unique for our church. It takes a minimum of three years to see change but we are confident it will come if we persevere and stay the course.

There is no simple solution to the decline in church interest and attendance. The process includes a coach who we have available to us whenever we need support. We have electronic Team Meetings where we use technology to meet with two other churches and the leader to discuss what we have been doing and to get support and ideas from each other. We also have semi annual meetings with all the churches in the state who have signed on to be a part of this initiative. There is an annual cost of $1,500 to be a part of this initiative, which includes support of a coach by phone and email, team meetings, pastoral meetings and all the advice we could possibly ask for. Bob and Ginny Kottkamp very generously subsidized this effort the first year by donating half of the fee. Thank you so much Ginny and Bob.

Next I formed a committee that consists of David Almond, Christine Boardman, Don Harpster, Bob Kottkamp, Marge MacIntyre, Fred Marin, and me. We have been very busy and have been meeting monthly. There is so much to do and we are working hard to make a difference.

The first step is to make our church visible and a common word in the community. We have had articles in the paper, a presence at the town concerts in front of the school and at the Rotary’s Duck Race offering free lemonade. Our signs indicate ”Compliments of the United Church of Ludlow.” David Almond resurrected bocce on the green with free refreshments. Each week about a dozen folks gathered to play this fun game.

The objective of these activities was visibility and to let folks know we are in town with no pressure or strings attached. We are connecting with people, developing relationships and yes when the time is right, inviting folks to join us for worship. We have “invite cards.” We are updating the website. We have some one assigned to be a greeter each Sunday. We send a note to everyone who visits.

There is much to do to make sure our church is here for years to come. We hope to get more people involved in the life of our church and will be asking the congregation to help. We certainly are committed and will appreciate support and assistance from everyone.

We cannot just sit back and think things will change. They won’t. We need to stay the course and we will reap the benefits. You will be hearing more and asked to help!

Respectfully,

George O. Thomson

Chair, RNP Steering Committee