

**First Unitarian Church of Des Moines
Annual Canvass Approach 2008-09**

Beginning of Year Objective: Hold a successful annual canvass in order to increase pledge income by 15%

Added Mid-Year Objective: Create a buzz around the church's designation by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a "Breakthrough Congregation"

Committee Accomplishments: We chose the canvass theme "*An Invitation to Our Next Breakthrough*" and were intentional about sharing the level of pledging necessary to fund our vision and be the church we say we want to be. We shared consistent messages in many ways – via sermons, testimonials, newsletter articles, mailings and phone calls to our members, friends and visitors. We asked for meaningful pledges, shared why we care about giving to this church and were rewarded with an average increase of 15% by existing pledgers and commitments by many first-time pledgers.

Canvass Approach: The major tactic was a Celebration Sunday event that we plugged as a way for all members to be together for one service – which is not the norm anymore with one Saturday and two Sunday services. Prior to the event we held several small group meetings, offering this "breakthrough conversation" opportunity in four distinct time slots and allowing invited members to choose which one fit with their schedule, then sharing the location and host information. Our hosts were leadership-level givers who were more than willing to invite other members into their homes. This approach seemed to successfully replace our usual "leadership canvass" event, a preliminary wine-and-cheese affair with church leaders and higher pledgers which probably doesn't impact actual pledges much, anyway. We kept several leadership-level pledgers involved and informed, while planting the seeds of "why we give" with a broader number of others at various giving levels.

Specific Tactics: We communicated via numerous channels. Pre-event communications included two newsletter articles, a couple pulpit editorials, signage, photos from prior events, a letter sent to all members and friends w/ "Giving Brochure" (see add'l document), website info, eVite invitation and RSVP phone calls to those who didn't have an e-mail on file or hadn't yet responded to the eVite. After the event we sent handwritten thank-you postcards to those who pledged and follow-up letters to those who did not pledge – one version for members (pledge required) and another for visitors (pledge opportunity offered). The decision to follow-up with visitors was primarily because we chose to invite everyone to the Celebration Sunday event and didn't want to drop them without another word.

Celebration Sunday: By far the most compelling part of the Celebration Sunday event was hearing five of our peers share their stories of commitment via heartfelt testimonials. Having a video with cameos of many other members telling their personal reasons for engaging in our community and giving time, talent and treasure enhanced the testimonials and created a great energy.

Major Expenditures: Fees for offsite venue and continental breakfast, printing and postage

Keys to success: Start early – involve many – communicate openly – enjoy the journey. Always share recognition and thanks for all those involved in the canvass and all pledges. It is a privilege to be surrounded by so many generous and dedicated members and friends.