

**Strategic Planning Process
2007-2012
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
OF URBANA-CHAMPAIGN**

Congregational input has been central to the development of the Strategic Plan outlined in this document. The vision, goals and action steps are those that have received overwhelming support from the congregation and church standing committees. Two priorities stand out. First, there is a commitment to compensate our staff in accordance with Unitarian Universalist Association guidelines. Second, the congregation wants to see expanded religious education activities that require a full-time Director of Religious Education. Fulfilling these mandates depends primarily on a significant increase in the overall church budget which, in turn, depends on increased giving. The Board's leadership will be pivotal in translating the congregation's priorities into concrete results. We envision the Board incorporating the Strategic Plan into its monthly meetings and, perhaps, quarterly study sessions.

Background

In 1997, our congregation completed the process of identifying goals for the congregation to accomplish in the years to follow. A combined mission/vision statement was developed at that time. By 2005, many of the goals had been accomplished with great success. The major outcomes were the capital campaign and subsequent construction process leading to renovation of Fellowship Hall and other improvements to the church.

As with any long-range planning process, the time comes to evaluate previously identified goals and to develop new ones. The goal of our most recent strategic planning process was to develop a plan that will take us through the next several years and help the church as a whole be more in tune with the desires of individual members and friends. A church is more vibrant and engaged if it periodically identifies what its members and friends want to get from involvement, what is expected of them and what we hope to achieve together.

This strategic planning process comprised three distinct phases:

- Phase I:** March 2005 – October 2005
Development of a covenant statement to provide ground rules for how we will interact with one another.

- Phase II:** October 2005 – December 2005
Development of a mission statement and vision statement.

- Phase III:** December 2005 – December 2006
Development of specific action steps, concretely defining our fulfillment of our vision for the next three to five years.

Strategic Planning Committee

In March 2005, with the approval of the Board of Trustees, the existing Committee on Ministry was expanded to include additional members to take on this extensive process. The committee members over the course of the planning process were Jerry Carden (co-chair), Sandy Hannum (co-chair), Millie Davis, Bob Deichman, Valorie Deichman, Axel Gehrman, David Gross, Lori Davis, Geoff Levin, Jeff Unger, and Kathleen Robbins. District consultant Angela Merkert met with this group to help create a process that was as inclusive as possible while also being efficient and time sensitive.

Phase I: Covenant Statement

On April 10, 2005, the Strategic Planning Committee helped with small group brainstorming discussions during both church services to elicit responses to the following:

- How do we want to interact with each other?
- What behaviors do we want to encourage?
- What are our expectations of others?

Following these discussions, a Covenant Statement was crafted to summarize the promises we make to one another about how we will interact. The Covenant Statement was presented to the Board of Trustees for endorsement. At the May 1, 2005, annual meeting, the Strategic Planning Committee presented the proposed Covenant Statement to the congregation. At that time, a few revisions were proposed to improve the statement. These proposals were incorporated and presented to the congregation with opportunity for further comments. At a special congregational meeting on Oct 2, 2005, the Covenant Statement was unanimously approved by the congregation. (See Appendix A for a copy of the Covenant Statement.)

Phase II: Mission and Vision

Once our Covenant was in place, the committee moved on to gather input from the congregation about what members felt our church was called to do (i.e., our Mission) and the direction they wanted to see the church take in the coming years (i.e., our Vision). As a result of a meeting with the Board of Trustees to refine the plan, eight cottage meetings were scheduled during October 2005 to ensure adequate opportunity for all who wanted to comment. These meetings involved groups of eight to 10 people hosted by a church member and led by a Strategic Planning Committee member. Participants at the meetings engaged in two activities designed to encourage discussion about our mission and vision. In addition, for those people unable to attend cottage meetings, a "do-it-yourself kit" was available, providing an alternative means of comment.

The information gathered was then sifted to capture major points that emerged. Building on these points, the committee developed a Mission Statement and a Vision Statement that were approved at a special congregational meeting on Dec 4, 2005.

Our Mission

Build community.
Seek inspiration.
Promote justice.
Find peace.

Our Vision

We dedicate ourselves to:

- Expanding religious, educational, and social activities that serve our congregation and the larger community.
- Acting on our individual and collective commitment to promote social justice.
- Enhancing the diversity of our liberal religious community.
- Improving the accessibility and functionality of our facilities, and ensuring that they are an asset to our community.

In addition to this explicitly stated vision, the Board of Trustees added another point, namely, improving our governance and operations. This element was included in the remainder of the strategic planning process.

Phase III: Strategic Plan

With Covenant Statement, Mission Statement, and Vision Statement in hand, it was time to ask the congregation and committees to identify concrete steps to take, bringing our mission and vision alive. On April 29, 2006, a congregational workshop was offered, inviting the congregation to provide input about the strategic plan. Given the small attendance at the workshop (eight people), objectives under each of the vision statements were displayed at the congregational meeting in May 2006 and participants were invited to “vote” on the action steps they would prioritize. This was intended to provide the committee an informal sense of possible priorities. The results of the workshop and congregational voting are summarized in Appendix B.

The objectives that received the greatest support:

Expanding religious, educational, and social activities that serve our congregation and the larger community:

- Grow and develop the RE program to meet the increasing needs of the congregation, for both children and adults, including expanding the Director of Religious Education position to full-time.
- Expand small group ministry (covenant group) opportunities.

Acting on our individual and collective commitment to promote social justice.

- Engage in congregational social action projects, e.g., alternative spring break trips, house building with Habitat for Humanity, room sponsorship with the Center for Women in Transition.

Enhancing the diversity of our liberal religious community

- Increase visibility of our church in the community and develop ways for members to overtly identify affiliation with our church while doing public service.

Improving the accessibility and functionality of our facilities, and ensuring that they are an asset to our community.

- Conduct an assessment to address the regular and deferred maintenance, accessibility, and space needs for the church, looking for opportunities to include energy efficiency in building upgrades and equipment replacement.

Improving governance and operations.

- Bring levels of staff pay up to the standard commensurate with the UUA guidelines for similar-sized churches and communities, and assure that staff members are being paid appropriately for hours worked.

The objectives addressing expansion of religious education activities, including expanding the DRE to full time, and staff pay equity received significantly higher support than the remaining objectives.

The Strategic Planning Committee clarified the objectives generated by the congregation and then worked with the church's committees (Property, Personnel, Stewardship, Worship, Membership, Finance, Social Action, Religious Education) to gather appropriate action steps, resources needed, timeline for completion, who would be responsible and indicators of completion. The final result is a set of concrete steps to be taken within the next three to five years to move our church toward fulfillment of our mission and vision. The Strategic Plan is considered a living document that will be revised as needed by church committees, the Board of Trustees, or both. The Strategic Plan was presented to the Board of Trustees at its Dec 12, 2006 meeting. See Appendix C for the Strategic Plan in the form of action steps, resources needed, committees responsible, start date, completion date, and indicators of completion.

Phase IV: Follow through

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the Board identify a plan for following up with the committees responsible for carrying out the action steps they have identified. One option would be for the Board, through its liaisons, to interact directly with the committees. A second option would be for the Board to establish an oversight committee to work with committees and report to the Board about progress toward goals. Under either option, we envision the Board incorporating the Strategic Plan into its monthly meetings and, perhaps, quarterly study sessions.

Many individuals and committees have invested a significant amount of time into developing these objectives and action plans. For this reason, the Strategic Planning Committee feels that it's vital for accomplishments to be conspicuously acknowledged and celebrated as each action step is completed.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Covenant Statement
- Appendix B: Strategic Plan Objectives
- Appendix C: Strategic Plan Table

Appendix A

Covenant Statement

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana-Champaign, strive to sustain a caring community that promotes the personal and spiritual well-being of our members and of the larger world in which we live. To this end,

We promise to participate actively in the life of our church, to contribute as we are able, and to express appreciation for others' contributions.

We promise to join in shaping congregational life through processes that are open, inclusive, and transparent, and to support the decisions made by our chosen leaders and the congregation as a whole.

We promise to celebrate the diversity of our collective experiences and backgrounds including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability and economic means even as we struggle to understand those differences.

We promise to express our differences openly and respectfully, speaking directly with those involved, listening closely, offering real solutions in ways that are constructive and not judgmental, and accepting conflict as an inevitable aspect of healthy relationships.

We promise to provide an atmosphere for the minister to challenge us to think critically and creatively about all issues, thus carrying our congregations' commitment to a free pulpit.

We promise to respect our children, to encourage their development as whole people, and to teach them the values of our religion, and other religions, as well.

We promise to welcome those who are new to our church and faith by learning about their journeys, by providing opportunities to learn more about us, and by explaining how they can become more involved in the church.

We promise to support each other through life's ups and downs by creating an environment in which people feel safe to share, and by responding to the needs of the members of our congregation.

We promise to encourage one another in our efforts to promote social justice and responsible stewardship in the larger community and the world.

Appendix B

Strategic Plan Objectives

These were developed from objectives submitted by various committees and by participants at a congregational workshop. Objectives are arranged within each vision area according to their ranking (high to low) by the workshop participants. Numbers in parentheses are the number of votes at the congregational meeting and the workshop, respectively.

Expanding religious, educational, and social activities that serve our congregation and the larger community.

- Grow and develop the RE program to meet the increasing needs of the congregation, for both children and adults, including expanding the Director of Religious Education position to full-time. (32/17)
- Expand small group ministry (covenant group) opportunities. (22/7)
- Renovate and improve the space in which we conduct Religious Education, including classrooms and the playground. (6/5)
- Hire a volunteer coordinator to encourage member participation in church activities and cultivate our lay ministry. (4/3)

Acting on our individual and collective commitment to promote social justice.

- Engage in congregational social action projects, e.g., alternative spring break trips, house building with Habitat for Humanity, room sponsorship with the Center for Women in Transition. (21/0)
- Encourage more use of our building by community groups with social action goals. (4/9)
- Promote social action projects in the R.E. program. (4/8)
- Fund a third world bank through FINCA. (7/4)
- Facilitate cooperation with other social action groups in the community, including Channing-Murray's Social Justice Committee and the Interfaith Alliance. (5/3)
- Create a venue for various social/artistic endeavors to bring the community together. (1/0)
- Funnel social action fundraising through the church. (1/0)

Enhancing the diversity of our liberal religious community.

- Increase visibility of our church in the community and develop ways for members to overtly identify affiliation with our church while doing public service. (28/15)
- Reach out to multiple, diverse groups in the community. (4/11)
- Welcome visitors consistently with love and effectiveness, using trained greeters with established cultural norms of welcoming. (11/9)
- Expand the range of formats and content of our worship services, using them as a forum to connect with the larger community. (6/3)

Improving the accessibility and functionality of our facilities, and ensuring that they are an asset to our community.

- Conduct an assessment to address the regular and deferred maintenance, accessibility, and space needs for the church, looking for opportunities to include energy efficiency in building upgrades and equipment replacement. (23/17)
- Adequately fund the regular and deferred maintenance needs as part of the church's annual budget. (16/13)
- Fund priority major maintenance, accessibility, and space needs through a capital campaign. (6/N.A.)
- Improve exterior and interior signage and furnishings. (5/3)
- Demolish the High Street house and temporarily develop the property as park space, according to the existing plan. (2/1)

Improving our governance and operations.

- Bring levels of staff pay up to the standard commensurate with the UUA guidelines for similar sized churches and communities and assure that staff members are being paid appropriately for hours worked. (31/17)
- Explore and assess alternate board governance and committee structure options, moving toward a change if determined appropriate. (2/2)
- Edit and revise our Policies and Procedures to assure that we are fair from a social justice perspective in how we define and apply our P & Ps. (2/0)