



**5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
AT WASHINGTON CROSSING**



JANUARY 27, 2013

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees created a 5 Year Strategic Plan Task Force in May 2011. They charged the task force with exploring congregational needs and desires to prepare a plan prioritizing our actions and energies for the future.

The Task Force:

1. Consulted past congregational surveys and assessments.
2. Conducted 5 focus groups in which a total of 78 members participated using a technique called “Appreciative Inquiry” which enabled participants to express their views on what would make UUCWC even more responsive to their needs.
3. Surveyed congregants and friends about the ideas raised in the focus groups. The survey received a strong level of participation, with 178 respondents.
4. Using the survey results as a starting point for the conversation, interviewed committees, groups, and staff.
5. Considered the work and reports from other task forces: Growth and Vitality, Facilities, and Building Loan Re-Financing.

It is important to note that we found great enthusiasm and passion for this church community. Many areas of church life were very well regarded and will not be directly addressed here simply because we have no plan to strengthen them further.

As part of this work, the Board asked us to find out how people felt about our current Vision and Mission. Although some people felt there could be some small improvement in wording, most people were satisfied with our current statements, feeling the statements were still relevant and that we are still in the process of fulfilling them. We reprint them here because the strategic plan is based upon them.

UUCWC VISION:

UUCWC will be an inclusive faith community focusing our energy and resources on spiritual deepening thereby challenging us to become a dynamic and recognized force in our community(s).

UUCWC MISSION:

Inspired by our Principles and Purposes, members of the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing unite to create a welcoming, caring religious community. Within this community, we encourage and affirm the individual's quest for authenticity, wisdom and spiritual deepening. We gather to celebrate the wonder of the cosmos and the mystery of life, its passages, its joys and sorrows. Compelled by justice, we give voice to societal concerns and reach out to touch the lives of others.

Aware of our profound potential to affect the individual and global community, we commit our personal resources to each other and our shared sacred mission.

5YSP TASK FORCE MEMBERS:

Jef Buehler, Co-facilitator
Pam V'Combe, Co-facilitator
Marty Friedman
Lynn Hanson
Bud Johnson
Robin Pugh
Bonnie Ruekgauer
Mike Hanson (*Board Liaison*)

FORMER 5YSP TASK FORCE MEMBERS:

Elliott Dunner
Barbara Jensen
Jenn Rehbein

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING THEMES

This plan is organized into three themes: 1) supporting the life of the church; 2) being a force for change; and 3) taking care of business.

Significantly, the vast majority of the congregation (84%) supports growth. While there are only a few plan items specifically directed to growth, one can easily see that progress in many areas will have a positive impact on growth. Indeed, there are numerous ways in which items interact and reinforce each other and a few of those relevant to growth are explicitly noted.

I. SUPPORTING THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

This theme includes areas that have a large bearing on our spiritual and community life at UUCWC: membership and growth, fellowship, religious education programming (children and adults), volunteer and leadership issues, a celebration of our 100th anniversary, caring ministry, communications, technology, music and summer programming for children, and exploring changing our name.

Although worship is central to the life of the church, people wanted to see a continuation without specific recommendations for change. Since the ministry of the church is currently in transition, most issues related to ministry will be dealt with separately by a search committee which will begin its work in February, 2013.

II. BEING A FORCE FOR CHANGE

The congregation considers “being a force for change” to be at the heart of why they are proud to be members. The great majority of members want to have an impact on the world through the church. Areas include: Social Justice (including expansion into Pennsylvania), Food Ministry, an Earth Ministry, the Council for Faith and Action, and Denominational involvement. Being a force for change is also considered an element in a growth strategy.

III. TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Our third theme is about significantly improving the way we do the work of the church and significantly improving our building and parking.

THEME I: SUPPORTING THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Goal 1: Cultivate social, fellowship, and personal growth aspects of church life

Rationale: Both the survey and focus groups revealed that congregants cherish opportunities to come together in a social or interpersonal setting. These occasions help us to know each other better and to build the welcoming, caring, religious community that will appeal to visitors, engage and retain members, and promote growth.

Actions by the Membership Committee:

- Assess and modify, as needed, tools for welcoming visitors
- Continue to upgrade and improve tools for educating newcomers about Unitarian Universalism and UUCWC
- Evaluate new member process; seek improved methods for integrating new members into the life of the community
- Consider a more formalized “Path to Membership”
- Improve the methods for integrating new members into the life of the church

Actions by the Fellowship Committee:

- Consider alternative leadership methods for completion of tasks
- Evaluate effectiveness of current fellowship activities; initiate new programs and events
- Improve publicity of events

Goal 2: Expand Lifespan Religious Education

Rationale: An inspired religious education program provides the spark that encourages a congregation to grow. Our religious education classes deepen spiritual growth, encourage fellowship, and assimilate new members. Survey results, focus groups, and conversations with staff support a strong religious education program. A desire has also been expressed for more leadership training, and for a group to “own” this task; Adult RE is interested in taking this on.

Actions in Adult Religious Education:

- Develop and offer a progression of core ARE classes that promote knowledge of Unitarian Universalist history and theology/philosophy and encourage spiritual development
- With the transitional minister, establish several Covenant groups with coordinated session plans, open and finite membership, and trained facilitators who meet periodically with each other and the minister
- Develop and implement a leadership training program
- Send more people to district leadership trainings

Actions for Children and Youth Religious Education:

- Approve and implement a Safe Congregation Policy
- Increase opportunities for UUCWC families to connect with one another in multiple formats (e.g. interest groups, social action, retreats)
- Explore ways to increase RE attendance at 9:15 AM service
- Offer K-1 Our Whole Lives (OWL) Programming
- Explore feasibility of increasing specialty programming, e.g. curricula in Anti-oppression, death and dying, and social justice
- Explore strategies to increase youth involvement in UUCWC and youth group. Consider offering youth group weekly with a mix of curriculum, social justice, and fun. Encourage youth to attend youth conferences (cons) and District youth trainings. Explore interest in a Youth mission trip

Goal 3: Create new ways of engaging congregants in volunteering and in leadership positions

Rationale: Volunteering is a good way to be engaged in the life of the church and for our church to assimilate new members. Fostering volunteerism and leadership development among all our members energizes the congregation; people newer to leadership will grow in ways they never expected and the church will benefit from fresh perspectives. (Our survey results showed that many of our congregants will be ready to take on leadership roles about a year from now; see page 4 of survey.)

Current studies – including our own survey -- show, though, that many young adults prefer to take on short-term assignments rather than serve on committees or be committee Chairpersons. Matching specific peoples' current skills and interests to

either tasks or leadership positions on an ongoing basis is time and data-intensive work that requires focus and coordination, and partially falls outside the scope of our current Nominating Committee paradigm and/or Membership Committee work. Many other churches in the UUA have found that a having a part-time Volunteer/Membership Coordinator on staff made a tremendous difference in their ability to manage this issue.

Action by the board:

- Explore the possibility of creating a part-time Membership/Volunteer Coordinator position to coordinate the efforts of
 - Attracting new leaders
 - Establishing a mentoring program
 - Experimenting with ministry teams
 - Matching individuals and tasks

Goal 4: Celebrate and honor our past while looking forward to the future

Rationale: In April 2016, our church will be 100 years old. To properly celebrate our 100th Anniversary, we need sufficient time to plan and carry out this celebration.

Actions by the Board:

- Establish a task force to begin planning our 100-year anniversary for the 2015 – 16 church year

Goal 5: Take the Caring Ministry to an even higher level

Rationale: Our Caring Ministry has been strong for many years, but we wish to enlarge its scope from providing food and transportation to households experiencing illness, injury, or recent death, to providing services to congregants experiencing other kinds of loss, as well (e.g., separation or divorce, unemployment, loss of a home.) Congregants unable to participate in church and other activities for periods of time could benefit from more opportunities for connection to people and resources. As we continue to grow, it becomes increasingly challenging for a minister to provide all the pastoral care by her/himself, so sharing some of this work with trained lay leaders who would maintain confidentiality and safety could benefit us all. (The minister would still continue to provide pastoral care to those in need of her/his more specialized services.)

Actions by the Caring Committee and Minister:

- Create a unified system for providing visits, meals, transportation, yard care, and/or other services so no one in need is left out, maintaining a data base of who would be able to provide what
- Make a concerted effort to invite more men, newer members, and younger members to be involved in the Caring Ministry
- Begin one or more support groups, (e.g., for households coping with Alzheimer's disease or divorce/separation)
- Create a list of community resources that congregation members could utilize for specialized or longer-term needs
- Form a group of Pastoral Associates able to provide Pastoral Care to congregants. Pastoral Associates trained and supervised by the minister could visit congregants who are not in crisis mode but who could benefit from a series of visits over a period of time

Goal 6: Update and expand our methods of external and internal communications, making them more inviting

Rationale: In our electronic age, some of our traditional methods of externally advertising our church (e.g. ads and articles in local newspapers) provide poor results. People find our church most often by coming with a friend, next often through our website, and next often by driving by or attending a church event.

Internal communications could benefit from becoming even more transparent and welcoming; it's presently difficult for congregants to understand the scope of groups and events and who to contact concerning them. Once someone has visited a group, personally "inviting the person back" is a good practice; groups currently do not appear to be as open and welcoming to new members as they could be. Also, as we continue to grow and change structurally, we need to keep congregants informed about how, when, where, and with whom they can become more involved.

Both our external and internal communications would benefit from our Technology committee taking on a bigger role in the future, perhaps collaborating with our current Communications committee on various projects.

Actions for Communications Committee (and perhaps Technology Committee):

- Use various methods to change the culture of UUCWC so church leaders and congregants will use our website more often as a means of communication
- Ramp up the use of social media as a means of attracting visitors and assimilating congregants

Actions for the Communications committee, Sexton, and Minister regarding communications:

- Consider acquiring a “wayside pulpit” so someone driving by could see the week’s sermon title and/or other featured weekly event(s)

Actions for the Technology and Communications committees regarding communications:

- Consider acquiring (and then helping maintain) a VideoKiosk for the lobby, so people walking in the front door could see a stream of weekly events and news on a monitor

Actions for the Membership Committee (and potential future Membership/Volunteer Coordinator) with input from other church leaders:

- Collect and maintain updated written descriptions from relevant church leaders of what different groups in the church do and who to contact about joining them; make this available to all church members and friends and frequent visitors who are considering becoming members or friends

Goal 7: Develop a children's choir and explore the feasibility of a summer camp

Rationale: Knowledge of Unitarian Universalist hymns and music is an important part of forming a UU Identity. A children's choir would develop skills, build community, and give children an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the Sunday service. Our current music staff would very much like to develop such a program to fulfill an unmet need.

A summer camp at UUCWC would strengthen our children's UU identity and offer the opportunity for our kids to form deeper friendships with each other and others in the community. Focus group and survey data show that our congregation is interested in having a children’s camp; administrative resources would have to be added to develop and run this camp.

Actions:

- Our music director and pianist will explore the possibility of developing and implementing a music program for children
- Our Transitional Minister (with other interested parties as they emerge) will explore the possibility of adding a self-financed summer program for children

Goal 8: Explore changing our name to be more inclusive

Rationale: One-fourth of our current congregants are uncomfortable with the word “church” in our name. Although this is not a majority, it is telling us something important, which is that we may not be inclusive enough for many people for whom the word “church” connotes a Christian religion. It is possible that our congregation would be willing to change our name to be more inclusive and welcoming to a larger number of current and potential members and friends – also possibly encouraging more visitors to try us out. (This would not preclude those who like the word “church” from still saying they attend or belong to a “church”.)

Action by the board:

- Explore the possibility of changing the word “Church” to “Congregation,” “Community,” or something similar, possibly allowing us to keep the same acronym of UUCWC

THEME II: BEING A FORCE FOR CHANGE

Goal 1: Facilitate and support UUCWC’s commitment to be a force for justice, equity, and compassion

Rationale: A certain percentage of congregants join and/or stay at our church because of our social justice initiatives and focus. More than one third of survey respondents indicated a desire to participate in social justice projects, while members of focus groups agreed we have a responsibility to live up to our UUCWC mission. Many survey respondents and focus group participants wanted to expand our current social justice initiatives and/or add new ones.

Actions by the Social Justice (SJ) Committee:

- Continue and expand all SJ projects currently in effect, including our relationship with HomeFront
- Provide opportunities for UUCWC participation in UU and non-UU social justice projects including in Pennsylvania – perhaps in partnership with other churches (UU and non-UU)
- Participate in campus ministries, if Worship Associates and/or the minister also are able to engage in this

Actions by the Food Ministry:

- Explore possibilities for expansion of our relationship with HomeFront
- Identify new opportunities for providing food to those who are hungry, other than HomeFront

Goal 2: Integrate sustainability into our church and personal lives; renew and expand our connections to and stewardship of the earth

Rationale: To maintain our church’s status as a Green Sanctuary, we need a group to continue championing the work and helping ensure that the proper policies and procedures get institutionalized. Further, climate change is affecting us all, yet it is difficult for individuals and groups to change their habits in ways that will help us be better stewards of our larger “home.” A ministry with a focus on the earth could help us do all these things.

Actions by the Earth Ministry:

- Continue to expand the vision, mission, and institutionalization of the Green Sanctuary group as it transforms into a new Earth Ministry, promoting a Green Path lifestyle for all by
 - sustaining the elements of the original Green Sanctuary projects but also developing new initiatives for use of the building by us and renters
 - educating ourselves on environmental issues
 - identifying and participating in Environmental Justice Issues and advocacy strategies
 - being advocates in the congregation of best practices for addressing and acting upon environmental issues in people's homes in addition to at UUCWC
 - engaging in community outreach efforts, seminars, and Green inter-faith initiatives
- Support personal spiritual renewal in sharing reverence and care for nature
 - through worship services and programs (e.g., Earth Day)
 - By offering outdoor activities and service projects

Goal 3: Create a year-long church-wide social justice project while also continuing our other social justice work

Rationale: Many groups and individuals within UUCWC are doing social justice work – which is wonderful – and they plan to carry on this work during the next 5 years. Meanwhile, our focus groups and survey showed that our congregation would like to bring further energy and excitement to Social Action by focusing on a single Social Justice area for a year and incorporating that into multiple areas of church life (including worship, ARE, RE, denominational affairs, etc.) Carrying out a church-wide initiative, however, would require a structure that would prevent overlaps, ensure communication between groups working on different aspects of the highlighted issue, and so on. To coordinate an annual church-wide initiative as well as the work of the various social justice groups within UUCWC, it is recommended that the current Council for Faith in Action evolve into more of an umbrella organization.

Actions by the Council for Faith in Action (CFA):

- Initiate annual stakeholders meeting to determine church-wide Social Justice (SJ) project; include Religious Education (RE), Worship Associates (WA), Earth Ministry, Food Ministry, SJ, and minister
- Improve bookkeeping, scheduling, and other record-keeping practices
- Provide institutional support for UUCWC's SJ programs

- Provide leadership to SJ activities by functioning as a “Hub”, creating an organizational chart, holding roundtables with SJ Committees, acting as an advocate for SJ committees and groups, coordinating work between the groups, and improving communication about SJ issues to the congregation
- Support the minister in and inform her/him of efforts to participate in community SJ activities
- Work with Denominational Affairs to support SJ work on the focus issues of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), Unitarian Universalist United Nations Organization (UU-UNO), and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

Goal 4: Engage more members of the congregation in UU work on denominational and district levels

Rationale: Enhanced relationships will lead to a better understanding of our denomination and allow us to better coordinate activities between the groups. Increased coordination and engagement could improve what effect we have on the world.

Actions by Denominational Affairs Committee:

- With other committees, hold discussions on or create study groups on Unitarian Universalist General Assembly social justice issues, allowing our congregants to inform our delegates how they feel about specific resolutions up for vote that year
- Encourage more congregants to attend General Assembly (GA) and upcoming district meetings, informing them of details

THEME III: TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Goal 1: Undertake critical review of committee and board governance structure

Rationale: Our church operating structure has changed very little in the last 20 years. We need the proper infrastructure to ensure that when we continue growing, we'll be ready to manage that transformation.

Recent studies of congregations have shown that changes in governance have the potential to address some of the typical issues and problems that can emerge in governance structures like ours, including volunteer burnout, leadership development issues, and unclear role boundaries. Some of the newer ideas include having task-oriented "ministry teams" replace some of the work now done within a committee structure. Our transitional minister is interested in and knowledgeable about some of these alternative governance structures, and being in transition between settled ministers means that any changes would likely affect the role of the new settled minister. So, this work is timely.

Actions by the Board and Transitional Minister regarding Governance:

- Review and define our current structure and boundaries more clearly, and research alternative structures that might serve us better in the future
- Depending on the outcome of the governance study group, develop a process for transitioning and updating our governance model as well as communicating this new structure to the congregation. (The new names of leadership groups will be incorporated into this plan as they emerge.)

Goal 2: Govern more effectively and efficiently by managing records better, and by continuing the development of written policies to guide UUCWC

Rationale: In the last few years, much has been accomplished regarding our day-to-day operations. We've created a policy and procedures manual and a Strategic Plan; we've begun paying staff to take on some responsibilities formerly carried out by volunteers. (Our office manager has taken on additional hours, and we have created a part-time sexton position. Our survey had shown that the congregation supported hiring a part-time sexton to help maintain our building, and to pay staff to take on some bookkeeping and other administrative responsibilities.)

Although the policies we have already developed will help us handle a variety of situations so that as issues and questions arise, there is a thought-out rather than ad hoc process for addressing them -- there remain a number of areas that would benefit

from having written policies. There is also a need for a better approach for managing church records than currently exists.

Actions by the Board with relevant staff, volunteer groups, and/or minister:

- Continue to develop operational policies and procedures for such areas as Alcohol, Audits, Board Selection of Officers, Capital Expenses, Disposition of Restricted Funds, Donor Recognition, Handling of Reserve Funds, the Memorial Garden, Rental, Staff Evaluation, and Staff Expense Reports, including record management (and the passing on of records from former to current leaders)

Goal 3: Evaluate staffing needs as we continue to grow, keeping pace with UUA Fair Compensation Guidelines

Rationale: Our congregation agrees that our staff members are a major asset. As we increase in size, the amount we pay staff members will need to increase to keep pace with UUA salary guidelines. At the same time, we may need to increase some staff hours (with current or new part-time hires) to handle increased workload.

Actions by Board:

- Continue to work towards fair compensation for staff members as we continue to increase in size
- Do an on-going evaluation of new staffing needs, including expansion of some part-time positions or new hires

Goal 4: Create and sustain welcoming spaces which support church life

Rationale: Focus group and survey results, along with interviews of the Building and Grounds Committees and results from the Facilities Task force, identified three clear needs: i) renovate the Crossings Room, ii) improve our parking, and iii) ensure we have the means to replace major mechanical systems and repair structural problems. (Area iii will partially be addressed by strengthening our capital reserves via our new mortgage, but is also discussed under goal 5 below.)

A renovated Crossings room would have a lower ceiling, (with improved acoustics, better lighting, and a warmer ambiance,) and a new floor (with improved appearance, better ability to keep it clean, and increased safety.) These changes would enhance the experience of members, friends, and visitors.

Our limited amount of paved parking and the use of lawn parking restrict our ability to rent our facility, hold church-wide special events, increase our membership, or even

properly accommodate our members and friends when the sanctuary is fairly full on Sunday morning.

Actions by the Grounds Committee:

- Install signage for areas where parking is permitted but underused
- Consult with Hopewell Township officials to determine what can be done to lawn areas to improve parking. Once the permissible options are known (e.g., what kind of materials can be installed, how much space can be used), calculate the cost

Our Facilities Development Management Team (minister, sexton, and building committee chair) will review and prioritize other actions:

- sort out responsibilities for building and grounds upkeep -- including those of the Earth Ministry, Accessibility, and Memorial Garden groups
- determine where we might be able to add more storage space
- determine where we might be able to add more office space in the future
- complete a full inventory of our facilities' capacities, inside and out
- develop relevant operational policies and procedures
- replace our HVAC system within the next few years (also eliminating lobby ceiling leaks)
- procure some new furnishings (with our DRE and ARE chair) for some of our classrooms

Goal 5: Develop a property Master Plan

Rationale: Although this strategic plan (and the data we gathered to create it) cover many issues related to repairing or upgrading our facilities to keep pace with current and impending needs, the details of implementing various changes (and of prioritizing the timing of when they should occur) need to be further determined. A property master plan will guide the process.

Actions by Facilities Management Team and Memorial Garden Committee:

- Identify possible changes to guide future upgrades and expansions, using data they've collected on current capacities and the need for increased space

Goal 6: Explore building improvement-related financial stewardship

Rationale: The costs of addressing the issues described in the prior goal exceed what can be managed through our operating budget. Reasonable projections of the costs to replace essential mechanical systems (e.g., heating and air conditioning) likely to fail over the next five years, as well as handle expensive repairs to our structure, greatly exceed our available resources. Even though a renovated Crossings Room (and other improvements, such as in our downstairs bathrooms) might bring in additional rental revenue, such revenue might not be sufficient to cover the costs of renovation. The costs to improve the lawn areas in which we now park will also likely exceed what can be covered with our operating budget.

The costs of parking improvements could be incorporated within a capital campaign (if we have one) or within the Crossings Room renovations (if we proceed with that and finance that through other funding), or a combination of those two. On the survey, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they would likely participate in a capital campaign (35% "yes", 49% "maybe"). Furthermore, the top uses of capital campaign funds were Crossings Room and parking improvements, and reducing or eliminating the mortgage as an annual operating expense (See survey item 36.)

Actions by the Board:

- Create a Capital Campaign Task Force to explore the possibility of conducting a Capital Campaign, the goals it might achieve, and an appropriate campaign time frame, especially taking into consideration the timing of the new settled minister
- Create a Task Force to determine the scope and cost of renovating the Crossings Room and examine the feasibility of having rentals defray the costs of renovation

VII. FINAL REMARKS

Some of our recommendations require the creation of Task Forces and study groups to further research various possibilities and/or act upon the options that make the most sense. The Strategic Plan Task Force could not give “final answers” to all that needs to be addressed, in other words; timeframes will need to be adjusted and plans updated as time goes on. (It is recommended that an annual audit of the progress of this plan be completed, and that the updates occur at least that often.)

Several task forces and study groups may also be operating when the 7-member Search Committee is doing its work (2013 – spring of 2014.) Since the new settled minister would begin in the fall of 2014, an installation committee will also need to be formed early that fall to enable UUCWC to install the new minister sometime during the 2014 – 2015 church year. (Finding, calling, and welcoming a new settled minister that is a good match for this congregation is a top priority for this congregation during the next few years!)

All of what we wish to accomplish is therefore going to require quite a lot of people stepping up to take on leadership roles during the next several years. However, we thoroughly believe it will all be worth it and that willing and able congregants will step up to do it! We are entering a busy, but exciting, time!

Finally – and importantly – this plan has a section 2, comprised of a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet summarizes the actions to be taken over the next 5 years, the owners of those actions, and the tentative timeframe in which the actions will be taken. The Task Force is leaving it up to committees, the board, ministry teams, and/or staff members (including the minister) to determine some of the dates the different groups within the church wish to complete certain actions – thus also prioritizing the actions.

Five Year Strategic Plan Process

