

UNITY CHURCH-UNITARIAN'S ENDS FOR 2014-2018: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW WE ARRIVED AT THEM

Report to the Congregation and to our Community Partners November 2013

Unity Church-Unitarian has a practice of governance that calls for the Board of Trustees to establish Ends statements every five years. "Ends" are essentially our goals – they describe what difference we want to make in the world, and for whom. At its heart, this is a spiritual practice. It's about renewing our covenant, figuring out who we mean to be, and what we will commit to each other within, among, and beyond our church.

Process within the congregation

The process began in November 2012, when the board identified the question it hoped to answer in conversation with the congregation:

What does it mean to be courageous and vulnerable together?

The board brainstormed ways to involve as many people as possible, in as many ways as possible, to inform the board's vision of the future. Ultimately, the board invited congregants of all ages to explore the question at the following events: five group conversation sessions, two movie nights, a movement workshop, a sing-a-long, a play reading, a meditation, an Open Page writing session, a book discussion, a Young Families event, and activities with Tower Club and Coming of Age youth. Overall, 312 people participated in the sessions. (Note: we were not able to track attendance in a way that ensures an unduplicated count.) The sessions focused on the following four questions:

- 1. Share a time in your life when you did something that required both courage and vulnerability.***
- 2. Tell about an experience of courage and vulnerability connected with church.***
- 3. How could Unity Church help us act with courage and vulnerability?***
- 4. Thinking ahead to the next five years, what is it worth being courageous about as a church?***

The board also made these questions available on-line. About 37 people responded to these questions on-line, meaning an estimated 349 people in total participated in the process.

Process with moral owners outside the congregation

Unity's policies specify that our "moral owners" include not only congregants, but also those outside our membership who "yearn for the beloved community and see Unity Church as one instrument for its realization." So, for the first time in a broad, systematic way, board members engaged in several structured conversations with members of groups with whom we have active partnerships. These interviews focused on two questions:

- 1. How would you describe the community you long to see and live in?***
- 2. What needs to happen in the next five years to get there?***

Board members conducted interviews with staff and, in most cases, program participants, from the following organizations:

Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative
Jeremiah Program
Circle of Peace
St. Paul Interfaith United
Mano a Mano International Partners
One Voice Mixed Chorus
Ujamaa Place
Amicus
Saint Paul Area Council of Churches
Ministers Anti-Racism Covenant Group Churches

Thanks to so many

The board owes a debt of thanks to the community partners who participated in these conversations. Their insights and contributions helped us expand our thinking and see ourselves more clearly.

The board also is deeply grateful to the facilitators of the events at Unity Church:

Don Brunnquell
Amy Bryant
Drew Danielson
Rob Eller-Isaacs
Tom Esch
Dutton Foster
Jim Foti
Hal Freshley
Mae Gibson Wall
Karen Hering
Bryan Kujawski
Priscilla Mac Dougall
Kerri Meyer
Jennifer Rogers
Jamie Seeley Kreisman

The board is equally grateful to the staff members who worked with the board to develop the Unity sessions, helped promote them and logistically make them possible, and who helped coordinate the interviews with our partners:

Janne Eller-Isaacs
Pat Haff
Julie Handberg
Barbara Hubbard
Bill Lowell
Laura Park
Martha Tilton
Harold Watson

Themes that Emerged

The events, interviews, group conversations, and on-line comments produced 89 pages of data. Individual board members, as well as members of the Anti Racism Leadership Team, reviewed the data. The board then met in retreat to begin the Ends articulation process. At that two-day event, each board member and a representative of the Anti Racism Leadership Team presented the themes and ideas that emerged from their review of the data. Here's a sampling of the themes people identified:

- A deep need to be accepted for who we are, and to have the chance to be more. "Everybody wants to be seen and heard; everybody wants to be looked in the eye." We want and need to meet people where they are, be serious about welcoming both gifts and wounds.
- A yearning for authentic and lasting connection within, among and beyond us. It is through genuine engagement that new ideas emerge.
- Recognition of the challenges in making those authentic connections. The difficulty of taking the first step, of overcoming our introversion, of acknowledging our need for one another.
- The desire to make a difference together, to take a stand consistent with our values.
- Clarity that we want to stand *with* others, to do things together/*with*, not for.
- The importance of having a safe place to practice, to risk imperfection, to practice forgiveness. Being strong means we have each other's backs; this communal strength is better than safety.
- The desire for church to be a place of strong conviction plus strong association.
- Recognition of spirituality as the bridge between the authentic and aspirational self.
- Recognition that we need to acknowledge diversity of beliefs and politics among congregants, as well as to connect with other spiritual traditions.

New Ends Policies

After carefully considering all aspects of the themes that emerged, the board developed the new Ends policies (see page 13). The board has asked the Executive Team to provide their interpretations of these policies, including the metrics and indicators that will demonstrate effective progress on these ends. Our Executive Team is also in the process of developing a work plan aligned with making these ends reality.

The board deeply appreciates everyone's participation in this process, and is very excited about all the steps we will take together as a community to make the new ends reality.

ENDS STATEMENTS 2014-2018

Within

- 1. The people of Unity Church-Unitarian value a deeply meaningful, transforming liberal religious experience. As individuals, we**
 - a. Open ourselves to compassionate pastoral care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition
 - b. Develop spiritual practices that nurture reverence and encourage diverse worship services rich in beauty, serenity, community and joy
 - c. Embrace our identity as Unitarian Universalists and live out the principles of our shared faith in our daily lives
 - d. Cultivate a spirit of curiosity and welcome, growing from a desire for authentic relationship.

Among

- 2. Unity Church-Unitarian is a community of welcome, reverence, and deep connection. As a community, we**
 - a. Sustain and encourage one another in love
 - b. Reach out to one another across differences and stand together in the face of injustice
 - c. Value our shared ministry and practice it with integrity
 - d. Foster a culture of open, inclusive leadership and meaningful engagement
 - e. Are generous with our time, talents, resources and creativity
 - f. Are careful stewards of our resources and facilities.

Beyond

- 3. Unity Church-Unitarian carries out the work of love in community, making a positive impact in our neighborhood and in our world. Grounded in the transforming power of our faith, we**
 - a. Open our doors and our hearts to those who seek comfort, courage, and meaning
 - b. Build authentic relationships with people across differences, in the spirit of humility and reverence
 - c. Live out our commitment to racial reconciliation and to dismantling racism
 - d. Serve as a trusted and visible leader, partner, and advocate for the creation of a just society and a sustainable environment
 - e. Participate actively in the larger Unitarian Universalist community.