



MEANING AND PURPOSE

THE POWER OF THE VILLAGE

Who are we? What is our Meaning and Purpose as a religious community?

We are the church that continually works toward being a vibrant, inclusive, beloved community. The meaning and purpose of our church is to nurture each other toward our better selves, in order to transform our community and the world to be more just and kind, and toward becoming better stewards of the earth.

We are the village that has the potential and the power to transform ourselves, the community, and the world.

The greater clarity we have on how to embrace our potential, the greater likelihood of our success. These areas are all interconnected, much as the web of life.

The following details the past, present and potential of our journey.

On the Path - where have we been?

Mission: Our mission is to be authentic, compassionate, and transformative in our lives, in our faith, and in the world.

Vision: *Authentic, Compassionate, Transformative*

Second Unitarian Church encourages people to live with integrity, to nurture one another, and to change the world through acts of love and justice.

We minister to each other through vibrant worship, religious growth and learning, and a commitment to advocacy, witness, and action.

We come together to comfort and to challenge. We enrich our lives by weaving together our personal experiences, theologies, and practices into one larger tapestry.

This mission and vision served as reflections of the aspirations of Second Unitarian Church at the time they were written. Our challenge lies in the details of how to embody and fulfill our aspirations. Recently we have been on a path of developmental ministry to re-examine and re-invigorate the living of our vision. Four developmental goals were identified to guide us on that path.

Through our work on meaning and purpose, we began examining our progress toward those aspirations.

Developmental Ministry Goals:

- **Identity** – a clear and shared idea of our identity as Unitarian Universalists in this time and place
- **Welcoming** – to be a welcoming and engaging congregation for newcomers and members
- **Structure** – an organizational and physical structure appropriate for and responsive to our vision
- **Worship** – engagement in worship that activates and transforms spirit, mind, and body

Steps Down the Path - Meaning & Purpose Process

In early 2020, 2U's developmental minister at the time, Rev. Cyndi Simpson, advised the Board of Trustees to engage the congregation on a search for the *meaning and purpose* of the church. The Nominations and Leadership Development committee helped the Board facilitate this work, all of which was done virtually due to the pandemic and the church building being closed for safety reasons. Five themes of note were identified and brought to the congregation in town hall meetings and in outreach to further these discussions.

The Five Themes:

Connection - The theme of connection, in all its forms, is vital to our church. Connecting with our internal selves helps us define our own individual sense of spirituality; connecting with each other and the wider community helps us become the church we strive to be. Acknowledging our community's ability to remain connected during these unprecedented times should be honored and celebrated when we can meet in person.

Ministry - Discussions identified the following needs: to define the expectations of the minister as a participant in a collaborative relationship with the congregation; to support the minister in developing their role and relationships, which is critical to success; to use a transparent, clearly defined and communicated evaluation process that reflects the expectations; and to define the church's ministries.

Reflecting Our Values - As a church, we have found many ways to put our shared values into meaningful action. But we need to effectively communicate, to the congregation and elsewhere, about those activities and programs that illustrate how we reflect our values. Some ideas for this include continuing to have online connection opportunities after we return to the building and creating a YouTube channel that highlights some of our activities.

Religious Education - Members desire more adult religious educational programming. The church has an "upstairs/downstairs" syndrome, where those in RE 'downstairs' are often disconnected from the adults 'upstairs.' Greater involvement is desired of members of all ages in outreach/social justice causes as part of faith formation.

Note: A "ReVision" team has been meeting since March 2020 to develop a new vision for religious education. The team developed a plan where there are RE opportunities for all ages, an emphasis on community with more participation in our faith rituals by members of all ages, and supporting faith formation in the home, as well as at church.

Organizational Structure - The consensus is that our current committee structure is dysfunctional and unsustainable. Utilizing more 2-3 person "project" teams may involve more people in a way that is less daunting and less time consuming than serving on a traditional committee. There is also a need for greater coordination between committees so that efforts of one committee do not overlap or conflict with efforts of another. We also question if our church really needs 13 committees, as currently listed on our website.

These five themes reflect our foundation, our bonds to one another. Note they also reflect our shortcomings, which must be addressed in order for us to rise to new challenges and make our aspirations come alive.

The church we envision is one where:

- We see ourselves as striving to live with integrity and working together to bring about needed change in our community and world through acts of love and justice.
- We find ourselves in ministry to each other and our community through vibrant worship, religious learning, and opportunities for personal and spiritual growth.
- We feel nurtured and challenged in the diverse tapestry of Beloved Community, where everyone can be their authentic selves and know they belong.

Turning Ideas into Action

CONNECTION – Strengthening our connections to each other is foundational in helping us in working together to advance our mission and vision.

- Celebrate each other in community, especially when we are finally back in our building again.
- Energize caring connections through small group ministry, supportive networks, offering spiritual growth and religious exploration, and opportunities for sharing life stories.
- Strengthen connection to our UU faith through invigorating lifespan religious education, and continue to offer vibrant worship that reflects our UU identity and values.
- Help newcomers to find us, know us and become known to us, and to become involved in the life of the church in ways that speak to them. The Membership committee and the Marketing & Communication committee are greatly invested in these efforts.
- Welcome people of all ages and abilities into active participation in the life of the church.

MINISTRY – The church has diverse ministries: worship, religious education, community organizing alliance, support groups, sanctuary family support, to name a few. We are also in ministry to each other personally.

- Work together with a UU minister in strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Be clear and transparent in the expectations of the minister and congregants.
- Minister to young families, who have been especially challenged during the pandemic, and are in need of a supportive community during a cultural shift that tends to de-emphasize community. The ReVision team has identified ways to do this in their vision of religious education.
- Strengthen our connection to each other, and learn to coordinate our efforts and make it easy for more people to be involved.
- Support our many ongoing areas of ministry, none of which we wish to abandon!
- *Ministry is Service.*

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – *Lifespan* religious exploration is foundational in nurturing us toward our better selves and strengthening our ministries. It connects us to each other, our values, and our faith.

- Transform religious education in line with the ReVision team plan, which encompasses lifespan religious education and involves people of all ages and abilities in the life of the church and in worship.
- Revitalize adult religious education. A team of members addressing the religious educational needs of adults was recently formed, and three tentative themes of religious exploration for adults have been identified. These areas of exploration will be important ways for us to find personal connection to each other, our faith, and to the community.
 - ◆ Loving One Another, which explores navigating diverse relationships.
 - ◆ Loving Faith, which explores our religious roots.
 - ◆ Loving Mother Earth, which explores improving stewardship of our world.
- Religious education also happens in the context of congregational life and worship.

REFLECTING OUR VALUES – We and others will know what we stand for as a religious community.

- Celebrate the completion of the upstairs restrooms as a reflection of our values!
- Encourage the reflection of our values with diversity in our pulpit, music, and religious learning.
- Explore options to help our church and members to “live green.”
- Be intentional in sharing the many ways in which our church lives our values.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE - We must reimagine ways to share the responsibilities of leadership.

- Continue meetings of the Committee Leadership Council 2-3 times per year to facilitate communication and collaboration between committees and organize the church event calendar. Strong collaboration between committees, the board, minister, and staff is crucial.

- Consider incorporating an approach of 2-3 person “project” teams in committee work to share the load, as the ReVision team plans to do.
- Encourage committees to explore other ways of working that streamlines, simplifies and shares the load of their work with more people.
- The Board, Nominations and Leadership Development, and Committee Leadership Council will explore ways to reimagine committee structure.

Staying the Course and Harnessing the Power

How we monitor progress and make course corrections

- The Committee Leadership Council will review this plan as a regular agenda item to monitor efforts and make needed adjustments, or make suggestions to the Board of Trustees.
- The Board of Trustees will review the plan quarterly and make adjustments as appropriate.
- **Markers to consider:**
 - ◆ What opportunities are there for connection to our faith?
 - ◆ What opportunities are there for connection with each other?
 - ◆ Does worship reflect our UU values and honor diversity?
 - ◆ Does our building reflect our UU values?
 - ◆ Are people of all ages and abilities participating in worship and the life of the church?
 - ◆ Are diverse religious education opportunities available for all ages?
 - ◆ What are we doing to dismantle systemic racism?
 - ◆ What are our ministries of outreach?
 - Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) - organizing alliance
 - Omaha Area Sanctuary Network (OASN) - family support
 - Open Arms Trans Social group (OATS)
 - Any other outreach ministries?
 - ◆ Ministries that serve members:
 - Fellowship events and groups
 - Religious education
 - ◆ Soul Matters
 - ◆ Chalice Home
 - ◆ Adult Education opportunities
 - ◆ What new religious education programs are there?
 - Worship
 - Dementia caregivers support group
 - Are other ministries needed?
 - ◆ Are responsibilities being shared with a majority of church members?
 - ◆ Are committees collaborating with each other and synchronizing the church calendar?
- We all need to continually ask ourselves: Are we still *On the Path* to who we strive to be as a viable vibrant religious community? A community that speaks to all... with a **Structure** that supports us to **Reflect our Values**, to **Connect** with one another, to provide **Religious Education** for all ages, and the collaborative **Ministry** to realize the power of our village. Are we living in covenant and trust with each other as a **Beloved Community**?

So where do YOU fit in?

What can you do to grow the Power of our Village?