

Living Our Mission: A Five Year Plan

Mission Statement: “**We are a sanctuary of love and welcome for all, dedicated to lifelong intellectual and spiritual exploration, and committed to leading, acting, and speaking for social justice and stewardship of the earth.”**

PREAMBLE

Following the adoption of our mission statement in December of 2016, the Board of Trustees set into motion the development of a new strategic plan. A team (Chandra Bramlett-Mitchell, Alisa Malarcik, Melonie Michelson, Tina Ughrin and Steve Weeks) was appointed and charged with developing a plan that would establish congregational goals for the next five years. The team reviewed previous congregation-wide surveys and other data and then created a new survey which was conducted in February 2017. The data from the survey was shared at a meeting of approximately 40 congregational leaders held on March 11, 2017. This meeting produced proposed goals for living our mission over the next five years. The Strategic Planning Team took the results of that meeting and formulated this plan.

The contents of the plan are ambitious and wide-ranging. The ideas represent the collective courage and imagination of the congregation. Implementing it will require flexibility, collaboration, and energy. In addition to the specific goals of the plan, we recommend that the Board of Trustees

- Take responsibility for the overall implementation of the plan.
- Appoint a task force to reexamine the organizational structure of the church.
- Charge the Leadership Development Team and the Volunteer Coordinator with cultivating and developing a wider and more diverse circle of leaders.
- Undertake regular assessment of the plan in conjunction with the Committee on Ministries.
- Recognize that many of these goals will require support from the church budget and a greater financial commitment from the congregation.

As we strive to turn these words into action and to live our mission, the UU Church of Akron sets the following goals, which are to be achieved over the next five years.

SANCTUARY OF LOVE AND WELCOME FOR ALL

Our current Unison Affirmation states, “Love is the doctrine of this church” and the UU Church of Akron seeks, above all else, to be a community guided by love. Love leads us to welcome and celebrate all who want to share their spiritual lives with us, to respect and

cherish one another, and to create greater opportunities to build a sense of community, connection, and belonging among our members.

In order to live our mission of being a sanctuary of love and welcome for all within our church, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron will:

- Increase opportunities for connection and fellowship within the church community by offering multigenerational social events (potlucks, picnics, holiday parties, etc.) and through the use of themed tables (specific discussion topics, games, volunteer opportunities, etc.) during coffee hour. To achieve this goal, we will:
 - Create a new Fun & Fellowship Committee charged with organizing multigenerational social events and creating increased opportunities for connection during coffee hour. The committee will be created by the Board of Trustees with guidance from the Leadership Development Team and the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Upgrade the accessibility of our physical space by implementing the recommendations of the Sanctuary task force.
 - Completion of this goal depends upon our ability to raise the necessary funds and will require the development of a fundraising strategy.
- Begin the process for receiving certification as an Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry (AIM) congregation from the Unitarian Universalist Association.
 - The Board of Trustees is charged with creating a task force to oversee the AIM certification process.

In order to live our mission of being a sanctuary of love and welcome for all in the community at large, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron will:

- Continue our work for social justice in the local community, with an emphasis on reaching out to communities that are underrepresented within our church and in society at large (people of color, the LGBTQ community, those who are economically disadvantaged, etc.).
- Broaden outreach at regular events held at the church (e.g., the Community Meal and legal clinics for local immigrants) and by having an active presence at events in the local community (e.g., art festivals, community celebrations, etc.).
- Expand our presence on social and mass media, including Radio Free Akron, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, press releases. etc.

LIFELONG INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL EXPLORATION

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron is dedicated to spiritual growth for children, youth, and adults. Recognizing that our current program for children and youth is one of our greatest strengths, we will:

- Continue excellence in Religious Education for children and youth by updating the curriculum.
- Create a volunteer Adult R.E. Coordinator position to develop and deepen lifelong learning in the congregation. The Adult R.E. Coordinator will work with the minister to:
 - Increase the number and variety of Adult Enrichment classes and workshops, including art and other creative opportunities as well as programs in physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being.
 - Develop and implement policies and procedures for setting goals and priorities for the Adult Religious Education program.
- Expand the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program beyond our current offerings to include classes for adults, youth, and children. In order to accomplish this goal, the church will need to:
 - Increase the number of trained OWL facilitators.
- Explore specific ways to expand and deepen our spiritual and musical experiences in worship by continually updating our understanding of congregational preferences around worship and music.
- Create additional opportunities outside of worship and classes to experience intellectual and spiritual deepening, such as Java Jive, guest speaker programs, “Ted Tuesdays,” etc.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron strives to live our UU principles and values by leading, acting, and speaking for social justice. We will engage in meaningful social action activities on issues of importance to our congregation while, at the same time, listening and responding to voices that are under-represented in our church community. While we give priority to acting locally, our social concern and activism are also national and global.

Drawing on our congregation’s existing social action programs, we will achieve the following goals:

- Broaden our current programs, including Immigration, Food Justice, LGBTQ Outreach, and Racial Justice.
 - Immigration – Deepen our collaborative partnership with the Immigrant Worker Project and declare the UU Church of Akron to be a “Sanctuary Congregation.”
 - LGBTQ Outreach – Expand our work with the Teen Pride Network, make our voice heard in the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ rights, and explore new ways to support those communities facing oppression and danger because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, including transgender teens.
 - Racial Justice – Continue our work with Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and increase our voice and visibility in the struggle for racial justice and against white supremacy in our local community as well as at the state and national levels. We will support/partner with programs and initiatives led by people of color including Radio Free Akron, the Akron Organizing Collaborative, the WOMB, and other projects and initiatives.
 - Food Justice – Continue the work being done by our Community Meal and Community Garden and broaden our efforts to educate ourselves and the wider community about the food system. We will engage in policy advocacy on issues relating to food and food justice - paying special attention to the impact the food system has on less privileged communities.
- Increase our educational and advocacy efforts on public policies relating to our core ministries through classes, book groups, and films as well as advocacy efforts like letter writing campaigns and acts of public witness.
- Integrate our social justice ministries with the broader life of the church through the creation of a Social Justice Ministries Council.

STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron affirms the 7th principle of Unitarian Universalism, “Respect for the Interdependent Web of Existence, of which we are a part.” Understanding that we as a species have an abysmal environmental record, we understand the imperative to lead, act, and speak on behalf of stewardship of the Earth. We therefore set the following goals:

- Make our building & grounds more environmentally-friendly.
 - Review, revise and update our building’s energy audit.
 - Update and implement the Comprehensive Grounds Plan (include unmowed areas as well as native plantings).

- Complete at least one major capital improvement from the energy audit that will make our building & grounds more energy efficient and environmentally-friendly.
- Create an Environmental Implementation Task Force to oversee these goals (members to be appointed by the board of trustees).
- Increase awareness and action within the congregation around our environmental goals.
 - Fully integrate environmental activism into worship, religious education and church communications, including the website, social media, weekly emails, etc.
- Undertake a broad-based effort to educate and advocate for a radical new vision of stewardship of the Earth.
 - Create a wide-ranging program of environmental education and political activism for church members and the wider community.
 - Establish key partnerships with local (e.g., the Sierra Club) and national (e.g., Natural Resources Defense Council and Union of Concerned Scientists) organizations to inform best practices for our environmental activism.