

Report on Mission & Vision January 2019

The current First Unitarian Church of Des Moines mission and values statement was adopted in 2016. Alongside the identified values of authenticity, acceptance, connection, wonder, and generosity of spirit, the existing mission statement says that:

Together we:

- Experience wonder
- Grow connections
- Live and love generously
- And nurture a more just world

During that same time ends statements were also crafted, intended to guide church planning and decision-making through 2021. This work has helped provide direction for the church as we have moved through changes in governance and ministerial leadership.

In this time of ministerial transition we've had the opportunity to explore who we are and who we aspire to be in this place and at this time in the life of our church. Our visioning process has invited us also to reexamine how we both describe ourselves and how we remind ourselves of our most essential nature. For this reason, revisiting our mission statement is one of the core tasks of the congregation during a time of transition.

This vital work helps us to ensure that we are focusing on the activities and offerings that make us who we are; that we can do most effectively; and that will help our members, friends, and neighbors understand our role in our community.

We entered this work deeply appreciative of the thought and care that went into developing the current mission and ends statements. However, the current mission statement is not widely known nor does it seem to be at or reflect the heart of most members.

Many members are much more likely to be able to share and resonate with words that are incorporated in worship and promotion of the church – that we are “open to life, expecting to love, and prepared to serve.” While these words are not our mission, they have functioned similarly in encapsulating a description of who we aspire to be and the presence we seek to create in our world. So, while the Transition Team recommends a new, more timely and more memorable mission and vision statement, we considered what in our existing statement and words expresses our highest aspirations for our community.

Our Process

During the winter of 2018 approximately 200 members and friends participated in one of 26 **Visioning Circles**. These small-group gatherings, which took place as part of First Unitarian's annual stewardship campaign, included a guided exploration of the following questions or prompts:

- Something I appreciate about the First Unitarian congregation
- An experience that illustrates why First Unitarian is important to me

- Something I long for
- Connections between the first three areas
- A value that I believe is at the heart of the congregation

Notes from these Visioning Circles were taken by scribes, and exploration of the topics and themes that emerged were the focus of a Fall, 2018 **Visioning Workshop**. At that workshop participants reviewed the scribes' notes and distilled the dominant themes from the discussion prompts. Participants also identified themes related to mission and congregational goals. The notes from each workshop group were saved, providing a distillation of the shared vision and values.

Following the Visioning Workshop, a small group of members, led by two members of the Transition Team, was assembled to use the materials generated at that workshop to begin drafting a new mission and vision statement for First Unitarian. The group was intentionally small enough to work efficiently but also broad in reflecting different constituencies within the congregation.

In addition to the notes from the Visioning Workshop, the group's work was informed by the writing of Unitarian Universalist Thom Belote on the importance of mission statements to clearly articulate why the community exists and "... what we are in the world to do." The work group was galvanized by and took up Belote's challenge to draft a mission statement that was clear, concise, bold, active, and inspiring.

We worked with an understanding of "mission" as addressing the questions of why we are here, for whom, and toward what end. Our understanding of "vision" is that it more fully articulates how and what it would "look like" if we were fully living into our mission.

Proposed Mission: Inspire Spiritual Growth, Prepare for Service, Heal the World

In our work we focused on the Visioning Workshop notes addressing each of the areas with the exception of goals, as these were more suited to consideration of First Unitarian's strategic plan. We identified the key themes and words that captured the essence of what had emerged from members of the congregation, and identified threads addressing impacts on the individual, congregation, and broader community levels. We also looked back to the words that have become such a central part of our worship and congregational identity, discussing how we might incorporate aspects in a way that reflected a greater sense of congregational agency.

One of the themes which had emerged from the Visioning Workshop was value for the impacts of our congregation beyond our own walls. Clearly our members believe that our church should foster not only individual and community growth but also the betterment of our broader community and society. We discussed the concept of transforming our community and the world, but struggled with the word "transform." The word felt mechanical, cold, and a little overused - and reminded some of us too much of toy "transformers."

A turning point in our work came when Heidi shared that she had been thinking deeply about the concept of "tikkun olam." From the Jewish tradition, tikkun olam is a call to heal or repair the world; it is the belief that our faith and actions should be done in the service of healing the places where our world is broken. For our group, this concept powerfully captures the ways in which we believe we can impact not only ourselves as individuals and our congregation, but the community and society of which

we are a part. In this concept we find a sense of warmth, humanness, and immediacy, and believe it powerfully answers the question of what we are in the world to do.

Proposed vision: To live our values as a deeply engaged community where members are free to pursue their spiritual paths and understanding of truth and are empowered to bear prophetic witness and advocate for justice.

In our discussion of what it would look like if we were fully living our mission – the vision of what we hope to be – common threads again emerged. We focused on the importance of being in community: engaged, connected, and empowered. We discussed the centrality of the freedom to pursue our individual understandings of truth and our own spiritual paths. And we lifted up the impacts we hope to have on the world through bearing witness, speaking truth to power, and advocating for justice. In using the term “prophetic witness” we, again, intentionally sought and incorporated strong language to capture the vitality and inspirational nature of our vision, as well as our belief that our actions are grounded in our values and beliefs and have the potential to change the world.

Proposed Mission and Vision Statements

At the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines

Our **mission** is to inspire spiritual growth, prepare for service, heal the world.

Our **vision** is to live our values as a deeply engaged community where members are free to pursue their spiritual paths and understanding of truth and are empowered to bear prophetic witness and advocate for justice.

We look forward to continued discussion as we work with the members of First Unitarian to move, together, into our future.

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