

The Five-Year Plan Membership Team Report

This is our great covenant: To dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

It seems obvious that church membership is vital to our faith community. No members, no church. Well, perhaps it's not quite that obvious. A coming together of a group of people on Sunday, whether or not they've signed a book, is little more than a regularly scheduled meeting. Our covenant clearly calls for a higher standard of community and purposeful focus. While it is natural for members to go through seasons when their involvement in the church and its activities is less intense, the covenant envisages a membership whose minds and hearts and lives are informed by the principles for which our chalice is a physical symbol. The suggestions in this report are intended to foster and sustain such a congregation through the various stages of the membership process. It will be clear that our ideas overlap (not impinge upon) other areas of church life being studied in the full five-year review. That is as it should be.

The bulk of this report will be a bulleted list of the qualities and processes we envision becoming a consistent signature of our congregation over the next five years. As with other processes that require consistency and a high level of organizational responsibility, we believe that the achievement of our vision will require the focus of a **Membership Coordinator** to be hired in the near future. The key responsibilities of this position will include record-keeping, recruitment, and integration of new members in partnership with the Membership Committee. Even this may seem outside our charge, we also urge strongly that Foothills hire a **Volunteer Coordinator** as soon as possible. The Team's judgment, supported by the example of institutions like Jefferson Unitarian Church, is that these two employees would work together to connect both new and long-standing members to committees, volunteer opportunities, church initiatives, and leadership activities. The result over the years would be a congregation engaged in the ongoing effort to live the principles we profess. We understand from the latest budget update by the Board that funding of even one of these positions is unlikely in the next fiscal year, but this is a five-year plan, and we will try to keep these hires on the table.

In five years, how should our church look and behave with regard to welcoming visitors, embracing potential new members and integrating them into our community, and helping current members to be actively engaged in the church and its principles? Understanding that some of the items below are currently a part of our church life, here are the elements of the team's vision.

Welcome

- A few spaces in each parking lot marked "Visitors."
- Clearer signs outside the church guiding visitors to the entrance.
- Ministerial presence (when possible) or a greeter outside or inside the door to greet everyone and guide newcomers to the visitors table, the coat racks, or the RE building.

- A newly-focused foyer in which (for example) the UU principles are prominently displayed, along with the theme for the day's service and an organizational chart of the church administration and committees.
- Ushers who will try to connect newcomers with current members as they enter the sanctuary. [Ushers and greeters might well receive more focused briefing about their duties.]
- Before the service, ushers welcome people who choose to sit in the social hall in order to make them feel included in the service.
- Active efforts by the congregation to seek out newcomers in the social hall between services or after the second service.

Path to Membership

- A call (currently by the Membership Committee chair but perhaps ultimately by the Membership Coordinator) to all newcomers who fill out the blue card.
- An active effort to track their continued attendance and to answer questions they might have about the church and membership.
- In some cases a personal invitation to participate in the next preparation for membership classes.
- The preparation for membership classes run by a rotating team of Membership Committee members and other church leaders, in consultation with the minister and with his/her participation.
- A two-part and overtly connected set of classes, the first dealing with the history and principles of Unitarian Universalism and Foothills itself, and the second with the organization and the funding of the church (including pledging and a clear path to service and participation).
- Activities that encourage the development of a bond between those exploring membership at Foothills Unitarian Church.

Short-Term Follow-Up to Membership

- Pictures and names of new members from each class displayed in the foyer or social hall. [Pictures of new babies and older adoptees as well.]
- "New Member" name tags for a time after enrollment.
- A table or bulletin board in the social hall to spotlight activities of interest to or specifically for new members.
- Hospitality for new members (e.g. potluck) and their specific inclusion in other events (e.g. dinners in the home) which will bring new members into contact with experienced members.
- A conversation between the new member and someone from the Membership Committee or the Membership Coordinator exploring what interests and talents the new member brings to the church and its work, on the one hand, and where in the church structure the new member might fit.
- The strong encouragement (not requirement) that new members create/join a small group ministry in which they can explore with one or more experienced members a facet of the UU principles or the call to service.

Long-Term Membership

The membership process does not end with the recruitment and infolding of new members. If it were to do so, we would lose as many members through attrition and stagnation as we gain through recruitment of new members. The Team's vision of long-term membership is implied by what we have said above. Members stay with us and grow spiritually when they and their families are valued and cared for, when they feel that they are of use in worship and service, when they feel enlightened and challenged in their search for truth and meaning, when they have a voice in the congregation. Such outcomes are not the product merely of consultations with or sermons by our ministers. They depend on our joint commitment to shared principles in our great diversity. Some possible elements:

- Tracking attendance and making calls to those who seem to have chosen (or have been compelled by circumstances) to separate themselves from the life of the church, the object being to discover why and, if appropriate, to invite them back.
- Sending recognition of birthdays, births/adoptions, or deaths to members of the congregation.
- Continuing the evolution of the order of service currently in progress, including making more opportunities for lay participation.
- Expanding and making more transparent opportunities for small group ministries, for social action, and for assistance in the governance and maintenance of the church.

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