

***The First Religious Society of Newburyport
2019 – 2020 Mission and Vision Discernment Initiative
Request for Proposals: Consulting Services***

Executive Summary

Introduction

The First Religious Society (FRS) of Newburyport, MA is a vibrant Unitarian Universalist congregation of 450 plus members. FRS was founded in 1725 and is housed in a historic meetinghouse-style church. Its white steeple has served as a landmark to sailors returning from sea for more than two centuries. (Additional information can be found at our website, www.frsuu.org.)

Having had just two ministers from 1956 – 2016, the congregation is just finishing a dynamic and exciting first year with our new minister, Reverend Rebecca Bryan. We've spent that time getting to know each other, establishing trusting relationships, and contemplating FRS's future. The Parish Board and Rev. Rebecca believe the time is right to renew our Mission and Vision, which was last updated in 2005 and 2007.

We have established a short-term workgroup consisting of board members, Rev. Rebecca and church member volunteers to begin this process. We are seeking an experienced consultant to provide guidance and facilitate this sacred endeavor.

Our Definition of Mission and Vision

Our lasting **purpose** for being, expressing who we are and our reason for being, is given in our Constitution and Bylaws. We recite that purpose in weekly worship as an Affirmation of Faith:

“Love is the doctrine of this church, the quest of truth is its sacrament, and service is its prayer.

To dwell together in peace, to seek knowledge in freedom, to serve humankind in fellowship, to the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the Divine. Thus do we covenant with each other and with God.”

Drawing upon Unitarian Universalist sources and the purpose of our own congregation, and locating them in the context of present time, place, and culture, we wish our **mission** and **vision** to be the unifying, meaning-making inspirations of direction and intention for our calling and evolution as a community of faith.

- Mission represents the direction in which purpose calls us to journey in these troubling times, and
- Vision represents the ends we hope to create by undertaking that journey.

Mission/Vision Process Design

As we embark on this journey, we've identified several questions that we're seeking to answer with our consultant's assistance:

- Other than actionable mission and vision statements, what do we want to achieve?
- How can we best sensitize ourselves to the needs of marginalized groups who are unrepresented or underrepresented in our nearly all-white and largely privileged congregation?
- How can we take into account the needs and wishes of our oldest parishioners, many of whom rarely can attend services?
- What do we want to learn about ourselves through this process?
- How do we discern the ways that the church culture is responding to all the growth and change?
 - Are there members of the congregation who are uncomfortable with FRS's new direction?
 - How many are delighted by the changes that have already occurred, and excited about the future?
 - Are there people who fear more change or feel growth is happening too quickly?
- How do we design our process to get the most parishioners involved, and the most deeply involved?
 - How do we want to bring out the gifts and life stories of the congregation, and to connect the visions and values of the people?
 - How do we engage the youth and children?
- Do we want to involve only the congregation, or invite others from the community into the conversation as well?
- What should the Parish board be doing through this process to prepare to lead from the results?
- How do we best use the internal FRS resources that are available to us? These include:
 - Data and information from the 2017 Transition planning process
 - Members with experience/expertise in the various aspects of mission/vision statement development, such as organizational dynamics, qualitative research, etc.

Desired Outcomes

- A single core **mission** capable of guiding all our ministries for 10-20 years or longer, and a **vision** to guide our strategic planning for at least 5-10 years.
- Mission and Vision will each attend to **faith** as lifelong faith formation/spirituality, and to **faith in action** as lives in this world guided by faith in spiritual practices and social action in this world.
- A **focus** for a substantial portion of our social action energies (now spread among many causes) on a smaller number of unifying common endeavors.

- **Consensus** among the congregation that the Mission and Vision reflect and contain our shared aspirations for our faith community, within which their own aspirations and needs may be nourished.
- A **shared sense of success** in our work and the quality of our outcomes, even if it means being flexible on some of our preconceived guidelines and ambitions.
- The congregation grows closer and individuals experience this as a spiritual as well as meaningful process.
- The congregation has fun during this process.

Our Consultant: Desired Qualifications and Role

- Successful organizational consulting and facilitation experience in a congregation and within a context like ours;
- Ability to provide and implement a proven process to follow for discernment of both mission and vision;
- Experience using the Equity and Empowerment Lens approach to planning and decision-making processes, to assist us in achieving outcomes that reflect our deepest beliefs and values;
- Inclusive gathering of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and direction from church members;
- Selecting, from all these ideas, those that are most vital to our mission and vision;
- Outstanding interpersonal and communication skills.

We will rely on our consultant to recommend process/processes. When circumstances allow, we strongly desire a highly-participatory, welcoming and inviting experience of inclusion and involvement for all congregation members. An example is data gathering and consolidation: we foresee that our own members may be qualified to facilitate much of this kind of work.

Later in the process, as the process transitions from data to crafting the mission/vision, and a highly participatory approach may not be practical, we are seeking professional facilitation and wise guidance for deep, respectful and thoughtful discernment and synthesis. Our abiding goal is to ensure that the mission and vision is embraced by all members of our beloved congregation.

Scope of Services

In general terms:

- Meetings with the Parish Board, volunteers and church members;
- Designing and implementing data collections strategies such as member surveys, focus groups, etc;
- Facilitating the process for creating the Mission/Vision statements.
- Other services as agreed upon by the Parish Board and the Consultant.

Project Budget

The budget for this consulting engagement is up to \$15,000, exclusive of travel expenses. Please note that this is a fixed-price budget.

Required Proposal Elements

1. Detailed responses to Key Questions (Limit: 3-5 pages)
2. Approximate phases/timelines for project completion, including interim milestones.
3. Resumé
4. Examples of relevant past work
5. Professional references
6. Professional Fee for this project

Process and Timelines

General questions regarding the RFP may be submitted until **12:00 pm on April 29th**. FRS's Executive Committee will then forward all questions and answers later that day to those who have indicated interest in the RFP.

Proposals will be accepted until **5:00 pm on May 2nd**. Please submit them in digital format, using Microsoft Word.

Please submit questions and proposals to Art Henshaw, Parish Board Chair, at art.henshaw@verizon.net

Additional key dates:

- May 6 – May 14th: FRS Team interviews will be conducted with selected respondents.
- May 15th – May 16th: The FRS Team will review the results and submit two recommendations to the Parish Board.
- May 29th: The Parish Board will meet with the two top prospects.
- June 9th: The Congregation will vote on the finalist at its Annual Meeting.
- We will begin work on this initiative in September 2019 and end by May 2020.

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Key Questions

1. Why are you interested in this project?
2. In your experience, in addition to coming out with a new Mission and Vision statements, how will this process benefit the congregations?
3. What is your proposed process to:
 - a. Discerning the ways that the church culture is responding to all the growth and change?
 - b. Inviting, engaging and involving as many parishioners as possible (including youth and children)?
 - c. Bringing out the gifts and life stories of the congregation, and connecting the visions and values of the people?
 - d. Guiding the Parish Board through this process to prepare them to use these results as a basis for future policy planning and governance.
4. How will you use available FRS internal resources that are available to you? These include:
 - a. Data and information from the 2017 Transition planning process
 - b. Members with experience/expertise in the various aspects of mission/vision statement development, such as organizational dynamics, qualitative research, etc.
5. What similar work have you done in the past?
6. What personnel will be used for our project?
7. How would you describe your consulting style?
8. What challenges have you encountered in past engagements that are similar to this one? How did you manage them?