

**ACT WITH COURAGE**  
**TRANSFORM OUR WORLD**  
**FRS VALUES MISSION AND ENDS**



## Values Mission Ends (VME)

### Progress Report

March 2022

**The congregation has been busy! After congregational and staff discussion in the spring of 2021, the Board and staff agreed on the following goals and associated tasks. They were presented to the congregation at the annual meeting June 2021.**

**The following is a midyear progress report to highlight what has been accomplished and what remains to be done.**

The five goals:

1. Work toward a more diverse congregation
2. Expand intergenerational and community outreach
3. Do Justice work
4. Celebrate the FRS's 300th Anniversary
5. Program the renovation of the Parish Hall

**Goal #1 - Create a diverse congregation that is centered around transformative and diverse worship and music, cares for one and another, and is strengthened by our differences.**

1.1. Work toward becoming an AIM-certified UU congregation. (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry)

This is underway under the leadership of Rev. Helen Murgida. In the longer term, it requires additional funding.

1.2. Have intergenerational music, drumming circle, or handbell choir

Music has been adaptive and constrained due to COVID. Question: is this task something we want to pursue and, if so, how? (Decision to be made by Sept. 2022)

1.3. Create and nurture a welcoming church that is accessible both in person and online.

This is an area of great success. We have restructured staffing and allocated staff and budget for the online presence of worship. That professional is now part of the staff team and not a consultant, a role that kept him at a distance feeling "temporary." We recognize this dual approach will be a part of church life for worship, church business, and programming into the foreseeable future.

Next steps: Create Zoom recording and streaming room in Lower Meetinghouse. (To be completed by 6/30/22 Justin and Rob C.)

Rev. Rebecca and others start podcasting. Justin has set us up with the computer program. It's a natural next step to continue the outreach. (Starting in April 2022, Rev. Rebecca and Communications Team create a new team.)

Cynthia and others will clarify the meaning of virtual membership. What are their needs? Create membership for folks who live a distance away. How do we serve them with things like pastoral care? (Important to have this clear by end of next church year – Cynthia, new member team, and others.)

#### 1.4 Have a beautiful, green "Chapel by the Sea"

Although this task is intriguing, nothing has been formally done to investigate or explore it. It would be good to assess how interested folks are in this and see how it can integrate with the Parish Hall plans. Do we abandon? Put on hold? Revise? (Immediately explore what people want and see how it unfolds.)

#### 1.5 Invite guest speakers and ministers who offer rich and varied perspectives, racially, theologically, and culturally, and those who have strong UU connections and knowledge of our history.

This is happening and folks are responding positively. It has included Revs. Mark Harris and Andrea Greenwood speaking about UU History, Eddie Carson, and CB Beal, most recently. There are others scheduled to come in April and May as well.

#### 1.6 Offer congregational conversations where people come together to practice how we talk with one another, especially when we have differing opinions.

These conversations will happen in Spring 2022. They are a response to the challenges of last year's Annual Meeting and will also help us prepare for additional decisions as we live into our VME. The format of these discussions was created by a task force which worked with Laura Park from Unity Consulting. There will be more than twelve conversations offered, with each group having up to fifteen members. Conversations will be facilitated by FRS members. The goal is to have 150 members participate.

#### 1.7 Welcoming Committee and Gender Sexual Alliance (GSA)

The Welcoming Committee has been reconvened to engage the congregation in preparing to update our credentials as a welcoming congregation to LGBTQ+. The members of the committee have been working with the Parish Board and CB Beal, who preached in February 2022. Two educational workshops will be offered to the congregation in March and April 2022, in advance of the 2022 Annual Meeting. The GSA is an intergenerational group formed and led by two of our youth. Their mission is to provide education and help FRS be a welcoming congregation.

**Goal #2 - Create a vibrant, growing intergenerational congregation deeply engaged in the communities and world around us. This includes expanding the children's and youth programming and the intergenerational ministries and programs.**

2.1 Intergenerational work (support youth and elders)

This has had modest success, though we can do better. Success is the Gender Sexual Alliance (GSA) and movement to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. We can do better with Afghan Resettlement, Climate Action Day in April, and worship – now that children will be returning to worship.

2.2 Intergenerational weekend retreat at Ferry Beach

Delayed for COVID, will happen Oct. 2022

2.3 Intergenerational music programming

Delayed for COVID, needs to be priority for immediate through next church year. There is no paid staff for this. How is it done? Do we find volunteers or renew budget? What do our families, children, and youth want? Can we partner with others in community?

2.4 Intergenerational 300th Anniversary-programming

Nothing done yet. Overall, the 300<sup>th</sup> will need to be one of the priorities for next church year. This year put together the team and committees.

2.5 Intergenerational service trip

Nothing scheduled. COVID delayed. Julie is considering for spring 2023 or fall 2023. Ideally integrate this with one of our justice commitments – racial justice, climate justice, or gender justice

2.6 Expand OWL (Our Whole Loves) age groups and open to community (K - seniors are options)

Nothing to date. Just restarting OWL right now, due to COVID. The new OWL is a collaboration with the Haverhill, Exeter, and FRS congregations. Is expanding OWL still a priority? (Decide NOW, Rev. Rebecca to talk with religious education staff)

2.7 Continue and strengthen our connections with other UU congregations for programming, etc.

We are collaborating with Haverhill and Exeter in OWL and also with Central Congregational with Youth Group.

2.8 Earth Day Rally

An intergenerational, city-wide event will be held on April 22, 2022. The idea came from our Young Church. The event is being planned in partnership with CAP (Climate Action Project) and other community organizations including Theater in the Open and the Newburyport High School.

NOTE: Overall, the redesign of RE needs to be a priority for next year, but we need to begin to put things in motion this church year. How to do this is a meaningful way?

**Goal #3 - Engage in justice work within our congregation and in partnership with others beyond the congregation who are directly affected by one, two, or all of these three lenses: climate justice, racial justice, and gender justice.**

3.1 Consider new ways to engage that go beyond giving money or food. Thinking bigger about the way we are charitable in our community and thinking about the ways we show up. Solidarity not charity.

Wow! This is an area to celebrate! We have the Afghan Resettlement Partnership as a big example. Also racial justice with Living the Pledge and the Indigenous Peoples Day (IPD) movement. Activities are planned for IPD for March, and we will have a flag raising of the Cowasuck tribal flag as well at that time.

3.2 Form a congregational commitment to buy-in on a three-pronged approach to justice including climate justice, racial justice, and gender justice. This includes congregational commitment via vote for all three (already have climate justice), and alignment of programming, budget, staffing, parishioner, and ministerial engagement with work in these areas, ideally that overlaps at least two of the areas, if not three.

Progress is being made on several fronts, including with the Living the Pledge workshops, the Anti-Racism Core Team, the Afghan Resettlement Working Group, Indigenous Peoples Day Initiative, and CAP with Young Church. JAM (Justice Action Ministry) is undergoing discussion about how they will be structured moving forward.

3.3 Work with Indigenous People Day Massachusetts, partners in Newburyport, and FRsers to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day in Newburyport.

Done! And continues with other work and in other communities.

3.4 Form an authentic relationship with a Black Church and work on shared commitment together

This has not happened, but we are partnering in other ways, including discussions about working with others on creating a resource center for the history of Black people in Newburyport. These discussions are at the early stages and will continue.

3.5 Addressing pollution overflow in Merrimack River. This would also then have intergenerational and worship integrated into the relationship.

Is this a priority or interest for the congregation? Can CAP help us access? There are interest and engagement in helping the Afghan families in Newburyport farm vegetables this summer, working with Nourishing the North Shore and Greenbelt.

3.6 Continue and expand prison work

The prison system has pulled way back from outside engagement with COVID. This is on hold and will be reassessed over the next six months to a year.

### 3.7 Hold congregational vote to become an anti-racist congregation in 2023

The Board has approved our moving toward this vote and asked the Anti-Racist Core Team to structure opportunities for deep congregational engagement with this issue in advance of the 2023 annual meeting. The “Seeing White” discussion groups were one way this happened. Living the Pledge workshops *are being run in six-week sessions* from winter 2022 through spring 2023. We hope to have as many parishioners as possible participate.

**Goal #4 - Create a 300th Anniversary celebration that advances all of our ends.**

**Overall, this goal has had no formal movement. It will be a priority over the next three years through the Anniversary. The goal is to have by the end of this church year a general sense of how we will plan this and who will be engaged. We need to be cognizant of the added workload on staff and how we adjust for that. Or perhaps we could budget to retain additional paid support for this – designers, party planner? Historian?**

4.1 Create timeline comparing events in FRS history to U.S. and New England history

4.2 Follow and honor specifically intergenerational events, our own long-term members, and development of Unitarian and UU thinking

4.3 Create several FRS history church services from the results above

4.4 Write an interim third volume of history – “FRS at Age 300”

4.5 Remember and name elements of FRS history that appear today to be us at our best and consider what led to these actions

4.6 Remember and name elements of FRS history that appear today to be us not at our best and consider actual or symbolic amends - for example, a sign on a pew, "Slaves sat here" or a history written from today's point of view the one-year ministry of the young Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

**Goal #5 - Renovation of Parish Hall into an asset of our congregation and the community at large. It is a community center that furthers all of our ministries and programs, pulls people into the campus, and increases vitality to downtown Newburyport. Built in accordance with climate justice policy.**

Overall: The Afghan Project has given us just a glimpse of what can happen there. What is our timeline for planning on this project? How does the timeline intersect with our Anniversary and with Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical? How do we budget for this, and again, what impact will it have on staff? Can the PH be an additional, much needed source of revenue too?

5.1 Whatever and however this space is used, it should be in relationship to the community at large. The space could be a community space and a space that advances all of our ends.

5.2 We see work on this

- Imagining happening as an outgrowth of our work the first 2 years, (FY21-22, FY22-23)
- Formally happening in the third year (FY23-24)
- Capital campaign in year four or five (FY 24-25 or FY25-26) This places campaign fundraising during our 300th Anniversary
- Building starting in year six (FY26-27)