

USH Strategic Plan Update – April, 2009 (12.12.09)

Strategic Initiative (SI)	Progress To Date	Is SI still relevant and useful?
<i>Governance Structure</i>		
<p>Educate the congregation on governance issues and possible models, and create such a model for adoption.</p>	<p>This has been successfully completed. In 2004 the Governance Task Force submitted a Final Report and Recommendations, in which it recommended the current structure of a policy directive Board and implementation by four Councils and underlying Sub-councils.</p>	<p>The original SI has been accomplished, but constant assessment of the governance structure remains relevant and ongoing.</p>
<p>Implement new governance structure.</p>	<p>This has been mostly completed, as the 2004 recommendations of the Governance Task Force were put into effect by an amendment to the Constitution in June of 2004, followed by two years of transition to the new structure. The larger issue is how effectively the new governance structure has been implemented. The results have been mixed. The positives include centralizing authority in the policy Board and giving better focus to the various Sub-councils. We also have improved administration by using better communication and maintaining a professional staff and minister. On the negative side, the line of authority between the Endowment Committee and the Board on finance and budget matters remains blurry in practice, and USH has found it difficult to maintain</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and ongoing.</p> <p>We continue to feel the adverse effects from having many leadership positions and not enough willing and able members to fill and maintain them, especially from the ranks of newer members.</p>

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	<p>constant leadership at the Council Chair level. We have not been able to implement all the Constitution’s requirements on procedures such as quarterly reports on Council activities and budget status. Though we enjoy a more clear bureaucratic structure, we have not made strides in streamlining the workings of that structure and the inter-relationship of its parts, as we still have over 30 councils, sub-councils, boards, committees, and groups to oversee a congregation of 260 members.</p>	
<i>Council on Spiritual Life</i>		
Worship Arts		
<p>#1: Develop and run a program to increase lay involvement by training members in worship theory and how to plan, conduct and participate in worship services.</p>	<p>Work is completed. Three worship associates from Rev. Sutherland’s tenure joined with 20 other members for training in worship planning, moderation, and sermonizing in 2007. In 2008 16 additional members were trained. Members (who are not on worship arts subcouncil) have filled nearly every guest speaker slot for two years. Monthly worship arts subcouncil meetings begin with educational sessions on worship theory. Testimonial speakers are mentored by Rev</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and ongoing</p>

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	Jamestone. This has led to maintenance of a higher quality of lay-led services.	
<p>#2: Incorporate more diverse forms of worship and music that broaden our experiences, reaching out to incorporate styles and content that speak to many different cultures, while retaining respect for our Unitarian-Universalist traditions and the overarching spiritual purpose of the worship service.</p>	<p>--Work is completed. More diverse forms of worship have been incorporated – especially those that call for more congregational participation.</p> <p>--Examples include the lighting of candles of joys and sorrows, the blessing of the animals service and use of meditation during the service.</p> <p>-- Forms of musical presentation remain similar, including choir with soloists, children’s choir, instrumental pieces with organ, piano and other instruments such as strings or brass.</p> <p>--Congregational singing includes rounds and chants, along with traditional hymns.</p> <p>-- “Moms and Children” choir is renewed.</p> <p>Deliberations continue for creating a Celebration Choir for untrained voices.</p> <p>Alternative types of worship beyond Sunday morning continue--such as weekly Dharma meetings beginning in 2007, 12 Ember Days per year beginning in 2006, and monthly Taize services have been piloted.</p>	<p>Though officially ‘complete, this work goes on as we continue exploring diverse definitions of the word diverse, avoiding polar opposites like ‘contemporary’ and ‘traditional’</p>

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	--BJ and Mattie plan services together, informally aiming at a balance between mainstream choral and solo vocal music and various levels of diversity.	
RE		
#1: Create and put in place a spiritual, dynamic, experiential, integrated and intergenerational program.	<p>Significant Progress Given the absence of hard data on the dynamics of the program between 2002 and 2007, progress can only be substantiated from 2007 to present. Due to frequent staffing changes and the challenge of moving to two services in 2006, the stability of the program in May, 2007 was less than optimal. Efforts by both staff and volunteers to create a foundation from which to promote growth have resulted in the progress outlined below. The curricula used in our program are frequently reviewed for appropriateness, diversity and quality. New materials are introduced each year in concert with traditional and beloved lesson plans. Multigenerational worship services occur regularly throughout the church year, and an effort is made to integrate the theme of the adult services in the classrooms. Collaboration between the RE representatives and other</p>	This work remains relevant and ongoing. An attempt to more clearly define the parameters of this initiative would be helpful.

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	<p>councils and sub-councils has increased significantly over the last two years, resulting in increased visibility of the children and families in the congregation. Both the Child Advocate position and the Children’s Issues Sub-council have been eliminated this year, as it was determined that the RE program serves both purposes.</p>	
<p>#2: Identify, acquire and develop adequate human resources, both paid staff and volunteers, to implement the vision.</p>	<p>Uneven Progress As noted in the previous initiative, there have been considerable staffing changes since the strategic plan was created. Staffing patterns and registration numbers are outlined below. 2002-05: 02-03: 175 03-04: 140 04-05: 107</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Religious Education-FT • Religious Education Assistant-PT • Youth Advisor-PT • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>2005-06: 93</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Religious Education-FT • Youth Advisor-PT • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>2006: 69</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRE-PT (20 hours/week) • Youth Advisor-PT 	<p>This work remains relevant and ongoing. A review of the vision for Religious Education is in order. Are our goals being reached with the current staffing levels? Have the goals changed, making current staffing sufficient?</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>2006-07: 69</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE Administrator-Volunteer • Youth Advisor-PT • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>2007-08: 72</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRE-PT (33 hours/week) • Youth Advisor-PT • Youth Assistant-PT • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>2008-Present: 94</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRE-PT (33 hours/week) • Youth Advisor-PT • Nursery Staff-Hourly <p>Staffing in Religious Education is significantly less at present than when the Strategic Plan was written. In addition, our volunteer staff is reduced from sufficient teachers to fill eight teaching teams to four teaching teams, and from ten members of the RE Sub-council to four. Although some progress had been made with the creation of a Youth Group Assistant position, current budgetary constraints make filling that position improbable in the near future. Our current staff and volunteer levels are adequate to continue the</p>	

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	<p>program at present attendance and productivity, they are not sufficient to implement the vision, or to support growth in the program.</p>	
<p>#3: Accomplish the portion of the vision related to life span education-related physical plant and facilities needs.</p>	<p>Substantial Progress Over the last two years, two classrooms and the nursery on the lower level have been fully renovated. Given that the rooms used for classrooms on the upper level are also used for meeting space, any renovation of those spaces would require collaboration with other interested parties. Currently, there is no plan to significantly alter the structure or appearance of those public spaces. At this time, the classroom space is sufficient for our level of attendance, and any short-term effort would be focused on replacing furniture and equipment, while improving the aesthetics of the classrooms using impermanent means. The installation of a new heating system that reduces the size of the heating zones has significantly improved the working conditions in the classrooms. Like our staffing levels, the classrooms are sufficient for our current attendance but there is not much room for an increase, particularly at the high school level,</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and ongoing.</p>

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	without reclaiming rooms currently serving other purposes for classroom space.	
Adult Programs		
Small Group Ministry		
<u>Council on Administration</u>		
Archives		
Art		
Building & Grounds		
Adapt the building and grounds to accommodate the strategic vision of the society.	<p><i>The physical structure of The Unitarian Society of Hartford is a warm, inviting place that facilitates the growth and needs of our congregation.</i> Many cosmetic things have been done in this regard including the “redecorating” of the lobby & historical lounge, the removal of some and revamping of other bulletin boards (2006). Fellowship Hall has undergone a face lift as well with the addition of some periphery lighting and acoustical panels (2007). Plans are underway to enhance the lighting in the ambulatory. There are structural obstacles to limiting the sound coming from RE classrooms into the sanctuary during services.</p> <p><i>The sanctuary enhances the worship and music services and the building permits the programs, education, and business of the society to be conducted</i></p>	This work remains even more relevant than when the strategic initiative was conceived. As the building ages and as USH evolves and changes, increasing attention must be given to the appropriateness of the structure to meet our needs.

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	<p align="center"><i>in a comfortable and relaxed manner.</i></p> <p>It's clear to see the upgrades to the sanctuary which include; the chair lift (2004), the pew cuts and addition of chairs with arms (2005), the sound system (2003) and some lighting upgrades & enhancements (2008) as well as the renovation/upgrade to the organ (2006). There have been some renovations to RE space on the lower level these past two summers (2007, 2008) and the recent installation of the new boilers (2007) and the recent heating zone enhancements (2008) have improved the comfort level of the Meeting House.</p> <p align="center"><i>The building and grounds allow for the planning and growth of the Society as future opportunities arise.</i></p> <p>Work has begun in this regard – for example the 2004 Build Use Task Force Report, the Charrette done in March of 2008 and the work recently begun with Building & Grounds to address the structural soundness of the building and grounds. Buildings and Grounds has paid close attention to USH Constitutional requirements,</p>	

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	which provide extensive guidance on capital planning and cost estimates.	
<p>3. Develop a long-range plan for chancel and sanctuary renovation and expansion that is consistent with the growth in our membership and the overarching spiritual purpose of the worship service.</p>	<p>There was no final report on the work of chancel improvement project, but the 2004 Annual Report has a section devoted to the proposed Chancel Improvement, including what they were working on and who was on the committee.</p> <p>Archivist Margaret Sax had records of earlier work, and B&G records were helpful.</p> <p>Significant improvements in the past several years include:</p> <p>1997--automated front door installed, which significantly aided handicapped access to the sanctuary.</p> <p>2000--office and minister's study were renovated, including wiring and air-conditioning--@ \$100,000.</p> <p>Lift installed after accessibility study-- @\$16,000.</p> <p>2005--organ update completed, creating additional space around the console.</p> <p>2008—ongoing sound system and chancel lighting</p>	<p>The current objective 3 assumes that we will be staying in the present meeting house for many years, which may not be the case given the current review of how well this structure can meet our needs for the next 50 years. Given that the whole physical plant, not just the chancel and sanctuary, is being reviewed to determine what we need, we propose that the current objective be replaced with the following:</p> <p>3. Ensure that the chancel and sanctuary continue to meet the projected needs of our membership and the overarching spiritual purpose of the worship service.</p>

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	<p>improvements</p> <p>Pew cuts to accommodate special chairs previously relegated to rear of sanctuary</p>	
Finance		
<p>Build into each implementation plan a financial analysis component.</p>	<p>Some progress has been made on this initiative. The Building & Grounds rolling five year capital plan is a good example of a successful implementation of this (2004). Another example could be the semi-annual offerings developed by Adult Programs. More work needs to be done, however, to make this a consistent part of our program and project thinking.</p>	<p>This is still relevant and it would be beneficial for the financial aspects of all plans and activities become part of the thought process for implementation. This is particularly important in “lean” economic times. We should consider defining what is covered by “implementation plans,” such as recurring events like Youth Ski Trip and the Festival of the Seasons.</p>
<p>Assess and prioritize implementation plans and funding mechanisms.</p>	<p>Progress has been made. Again, the Building & Grounds rolling five year capital plan represents a good example of prioritization of competing needs, subject to ongoing funding availability and adjustment. Emphasis in the B&G plan is on accomplishing tasks at the lowest possible expense, while using the largest possible volunteer labor component.</p> <p>Significant progress has also been made in the maintaining and reporting of financial data. The budget is aligned to the</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and should be considered standard operating procedure in our financial decision-making. We should consider defining what is covered by “implementation plans,” such as recurring events like Youth Ski Trip and the Festival of the Seasons.</p>

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	<p>governance structure and can be used as one tool for prioritization. The budget formulation process (and the existence of a Finance Sub-Council) has gone through some growing pains, but exists and becomes more formalized and streamlined each year.</p> <p>Progress on Stewardship is also evident, and, over time, we have evolved from having no canvass goal (2003) to having one that had no formula/criteria/rationale for its creation (2006) to setting a goal based on actual income/expense results and rationale (2009). More progress is needed on addressing the significant number of low pledges, i.e., those lower than income guidelines.</p>	
Human Resources		
<p>Define and empower the role of the Society Administrator</p>	<p>Definitional work in this area is essentially complete, but should always be reviewed for needed ongoing changes. The Business Manager is a key society role that has evolved over time. Much has been done to define the role – an updated job description was created in July 2007 and a comprehensive job outline was done in August 2008 as the position became a 30 hour role. In some regards,</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and ongoing and roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined.</p>

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	<p>it may be that we have split the Society Administrator role into two positions: Business Manager and Administrative Assistant, which has worked well.</p> <p>The notion of empowerment requires some work in order to clarify the role further. One important example where this is needed is the division of roles & responsibilities between the Business Manager & Treasurer, which have played out differently depending on who occupies the Treasurer role. Is the Business Manager the collector of financial data and the Treasurer the interpreter, forecaster and financial policy creator/enactor or vice versa or some combination of the two? Definition is needed not only for clarity but to help ensure that responsibilities do not “fall between the cracks”. In addition, some clarity may be needed to fully articulate the role of Business Manager as Supervisor, i.e., who and what roles should report to this one going forward?</p>	
<p>Ensure appropriate administrative support of the congregation that is consistent with the governance structure.</p>	<p>Work is essentially complete, but requires ongoing attention. There are designated staff that support each of the main areas of</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and should be an ongoing task. Upgrading of hardware and software and training of staff where</p>

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	<p>the Society (Minister – Worship, Business Manager – Administration, DRE – Religious Education, Sexton – Building & Grounds, Administrative Assistant – All the above)</p> <p>Clarity in these roles is also required, with work needed to more precisely define the roles and responsibilities between staff and the Councils/Sub-Councils they support, while clearly recognizing that the success of USH has been largely based on the efforts of many volunteer hands. A position of a part-time Volunteer Coordinator has been defined by the Board of Directors. The intent of this role would be to help identify, mobilize, and effectively tap into the skills of the many volunteers who are needed for the membership of about 30 councils, sub-councils, and groups. This paid position has not been moved forward at this time.</p> <p>There has been good progress in staff utilization of technology, moving from assorted components on different operating systems to a set of networked hardware with current and consistent software. Two data bases are used to</p>	<p>appropriate and necessary should be continued.</p>

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	maintain Society records: Church Windows for membership data and QuickBooks for financial data. <i>(July 2007)</i>	
Stewardship		
<i>Council on Community Within</i>		
1) Establish a standard, society-wide practice of describing every existing and proposed USH activity in terms of its contribution to the spiritual growth of individual members.	This has not been done.	Council on Community Within members feel that our charge is to create opportunities for connection, involvement, and service within USH, rather than to support members' spiritual growth.
2) Promote opportunities for the spiritual growth of all USH members. Encourage participation and stewardship in a process of sharing and reflecting upon individual spiritual journeys.	Activities elsewhere in the USH community have supported this SI, but the COCW Sub-Councils have not been focused in this area.	Again, current Council members do not see the Council as focused on spiritual growth.
3) Expand the number of opportunities for adult enrichment that are designed to support the spiritual growth of participants.	The development of the Lay Listener program provides a new avenue for USH to support individual spiritual growth.	See above.
4) To the fullest extent feasible, ensure that every member and every prospective member has regular personal contact with members of the USH.	Following are COCW activities and accomplishments since the strategic plan was developed which support this SI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-news • Website update • Lay Listeners • Caring Network • Welcome Teams • Neighborhood Networks • Caregivers Support 	This SI continues to be relevant, with a recommended modification that every member and prospective member <i>be offered</i> regular personal contact. Some may prefer just to attend Sunday services.

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	<p align="center">Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolution of Pathways to Membership <p>In addition, the ongoing activities of all COCW Sub-Councils support this objective.</p>	
<p>5) Promote and support diversity within the membership that more closely reflects the demographic characteristics of our larger community.</p>	<p>The following aspects of COCW activity support this SI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building the World We Dream About • Variety of literature in lobby • Targeted advertising 	<p>This SI continues to be relevant, although the “larger community” needs to be defined in order to make this SI more meaningful.</p>
<p>6) Establish a culture of safety that fosters the airing of controversy in a constructive manner, promotes a sense of mutual responsibility to the Society and the larger community, honors the diverse contributions of Society members, and establishes covenants by which members are accountable to Unitarian-Universalist principles.</p>	<p>Following are examples of programs which support this SI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay Listeners • Caring Network • Training in non-violent communication • Annual recognition of volunteers • Policy on Adopting Position Statements • CALM 	<p>This SI continues to be relevant.</p>
Caring Network		
Communications		
<p>Construct a communications system to meet the needs of the congregation.</p>	<p>Communications have been adapted to meet the evolving needs of the congregation. Technology has been used effectively to support this process. Examples of this evolution include the growing popularity and reach of the weekly E-News (Date?) and the discontinuation of the monthly paper</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and needs to be addressed on an ongoing basis as communication needs continue to evolve.</p>

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	<p>newsletter in late 2008. Much has also been done to revamp the look of the Order of Service with the creation of a cover and with the limitation of additional fliers or inserts each week, other than the Meeting House Weekly.</p> <p>Data bases are being used to effectively communicate with the Society membership, including an increased number of giving statements each year, personalized correspondence and canvass material. Updating of the online calendar and website occurs regularly, giving a vital “e-impression” to website visitors. Electronic communications by means of a minister’s blog and extensive use of e-mail have become a standard thread in the fabric of congregational life and work, although it might be beneficial to promote e-mail use standards to increase the effectiveness of this medium.</p> <p>“Tried and true” communication tools are still in use via congregational conversations and talk backs that afford people the opportunity to interact</p>	

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	<p>around a specific topic. BJ has utilized a blog to facilitate discussions. The new Neighborhood Networks offer much potential to bring disparate members together on a regional basis and enhance communications. Several discussion have been held with the other area UU congregations to see if there is opportunity for a combined congregation UU presence for visitors and potential members.</p>	
Lay Listeners		
Membership		
Neighborhood Networks		
Unitarian Alliance Ministry for Women		
<u>Council on Social Justice</u>		
<i>Recommended new vision</i>		
<p>Vision: Consistent with our Unitarian-Universalist principles of social justice, responsibility and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, we actively seek worldwide peace, freedom, social and environmental justice through awareness and responsible relationship with the larger community, which spans local, national and international borders. We regularly educate members on issues of social justice and encourage socially responsible action and awareness. We identify priorities, programs, and resources as a congregation. We provide and support services to the local community. We have a voice in local, national, and global policies that are of concern to our members. In order to participate meaningfully in an ever more diverse community, we embrace diversity within our congregation and within the groups with which we partner.</p> <p>Social justice, sometimes called civil justice, refers to the concept of a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely the administration of law - a world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society. Social justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equality.(Chair Bill LaPorte-Bryan)</p>		
1. Engage in an all-congregation process to	The final report of the Social Justice	This work remains relevant and ongoing. It's currently

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<p>evaluate our internal structure and issues as they relate to the larger community.</p>	<p>Empowerment Task Force included a strong recommendation that this initiative be used as the basis for USH social justice programs. Progress to date has in fact been based on this recommendation.</p> <p>In addition to reviewing and incorporating the suggestions from the 2008 congregational charrette, a congregational social justice survey was offered to the congregants at both worship services on January 4th, 2009 which was Justice Sunday at USH. The comprehensive three-page survey was designed to provide information to the Council on Social Justice about which social justice issues and causes USH members consider most important, which ones they feel the church should be involved in and which ones they would like to volunteer in. The results from this survey will guide the Social Justice Council as it decides what issues to focus on, what volunteer opportunities to offer to USH members and what outside organizations our church should have a relationship with.</p>	<p>the focus of the work of the Council on Social Justice. It's anticipated that changes in the organization of the Social Justice sub-councils as well as some of their missions will result from the information provided by the survey.</p>
<p>2. Establish as an expectation of USH membership ongoing</p>	<p>This expectation has been fostered in the many worship services that have</p>	<p>This work remains relevant and will continue.</p>

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community service by every Society member.	included references in sermons, prayers, readings and testimonials to the personal, societal and community benefits of including community service in member’s lives. At these times, involvement in broader social justice issues has often been encouraged as well.	
3. Regularly communicate to the Society membership examples of the community service activities of individual members, emphasizing the relationship of community service to individual spiritual growth.	In addition to frequent articles in USH E-News and the Weekly Messenger OOS insert, the annual Justice Sunday, Disabilities Sunday and Youth Sunday services include numerous examples of member’s social justice involvement and activities. On March 16 th , 2008, our partnership with the Noah Webster School was kicked off during the worship services with many specific examples how USH members could volunteer at the school. The member testimonials that are given on the eight Sundays when a special offering is taken for donation to a social justice organization often include examples of the things the speaker has done or plans to do. A common theme of all of this communication is the intimate connection between social service and personal spiritual growth.	This work remains relevant and will continue.
Equal Access		

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Green Sanctuary		
<p><i>Recommended new initiative</i></p> <p>4. Application for certification as a Green Sanctuary</p>	<p>Green Sanctuary sub-council has been formed with the task to conduct an environmental assessment of current practices which span all areas of congregation life: worship, RE, buildings/grounds, member practices sustainable living and environmental justice. An action plan of at least 12 activities/projects within the various aspects of congregational life will be developed and acted upon. After activities are completed and documented, the congregation must vote to apply for accreditation and a documented report will be submitted.</p>	
Information & Advocacy		
Interweave		
Noah Webster Partnership		