

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Of the Eastern Slopes**

Strategic Plan

December 2013

Introduction

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES) has engaged in a number of important planning activities over its history. The Fellowship was founded in the 1960s and was officially recognized by UUA in 1982. At that point it had twelve members and a savings account with \$250. Members met in each other's homes and services were led by lay people. There is an excellent account of the Fellowship's early history on its web site, www.uufes.org.

Though the first strategic plan of the Fellowship wasn't ever documented in one place, nonetheless it was clear. The organization needed to grow to the point where it could afford first a part-time minister, then a full time minister. It needed first rental space, and later space of its own. Finally it needed to become a formal organization with bylaws, organizational structures, and services both for adults and for children. Over the next two decades, most of these goals were met. Rev. Mary Edes was called in 2003 and gradually the Fellowship increased her time until she became full time in 2008. The Fellowship rented space for a number of years in North Conway and other towns, and eventually rented Runnels Hall in Chocorua. A major accomplishment was moving into its own building in 2005. By 2008, the mortgage on this building had been retired. Meanwhile bylaws were passed, religious education classes begun, and a committee structure to support the operation of the Fellowship instituted.

Throughout the years of Rev. Mary's leadership, the Board launched a number of important planning efforts and made steady progress on the goals generated in these efforts. The current effort was launched in June 2013 with the aim of generating the last "missing piece" of this effort and of pulling all the pieces that have been generated over the past decade into one document. That effort became more important in July when Rev. Mary announced that she would be retiring at the end of 2013. It was clear that we needed a coherent plan to inform candidates for both the interim and permanent position about who we are and what we want for our future.

The major missing piece in all this work was a statement of our vision for the future. We want to call a minister who will share that vision and who has the skills and experience to lead us as we pursue it. To that end, the entire congregation was invited to a retreat on Sept. 21, 2013 at World Fellowship. A Committee consisting of Betsy Loughran, Chair, Ingrid Albee, Margaret Reiser, Rod Forsman, Rev. Mary Edes, and John Flanagan planned the retreat. At the retreat, the congregation generated the materials that are included in the vision components of this plan. In the months that followed, the committee synthesized that information into a vision statement and goals approved by the Board in November 2013 and by the congregation in December 2013. This full plan integrates that work with the

mission that was adopted in 2002 and the principles accepted by Unitarian Universalists across the country.

This Draft Plan contains the following components:

1. The Mission of UUFES adopted in 2002
2. The Principles of Unitarian Universalists
3. The Vision for UUFES confirmed December 2013
4. Goals for 2014-2016 accepted December 2013
5. Background material
 - a. A Vision Story: An imaginary story capturing some of the ideas generated at the September 2013 Retreat

**The Mission of the
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes
Adopted 2002**

**Our mission is to be
a welcoming congregation of people
of good will who unite:**

- To encourage and support spiritual and intellectual growth in children, youth, and adults.
- To be a living model of respect for diversity and difference, encouraging the free expression of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.
- To provide a caring community in which individuals and families come together in friendship, respect, and joy.
- To act on our Unitarian Universalist Principles to improve our community, locally and globally, through social action and outreach.

Principles of Unitarian Universalists

Unitarian Universalism is a religion of faith in humankind.

We recognize that each individual's religious search is a deeply personal matter, and our community endeavors to nourish that which is spiritual for each of us.

For wisdom and inspiration we look to a wide variety of writings, teachings, experiences, and religions. Using reason, responsibility and tolerance is important for us, and we have no formalized creed or rigid dogma.

Coming together in a congenial spirit of religious freedom, we seek to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth of every person.
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in our congregations and in society at large.
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

**The Vision of the
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes**

Confirmed December 2013

UUFES is a welcoming, actively engaged community that values all people. We embrace diversity. We gather to deepen our spiritual lives, using words, music, and ritual to inspire us to live at our very best. We nurture our children so they are able to discover their own paths and to embrace the values of love, truth, understanding and service. We bring our UU principles to life through social action. Our vision is that through action, we ourselves will become better people and our world a more peaceful place

**Strategic Goals
Of the
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes
2014-2016**

Confirmed December 2013

1. To engage an interim minister who will guide us through our transitional process.
2. To conduct a thorough search process resulting in hiring a settled minister who will guide us as we implement our vision.
3. To develop specific projects within our vision for worship, membership, children and youth, and social action.

Background Materials

**Vision Quest
Imagining UUFES in 2020**

It is the fall of 2020 and a group of UUFES members who moved to Florida a number of years ago were coming back for a week's visit. They had all attended the retreat back in 2013 and were excited to see how much of that vision had come to pass. It was Sunday morning on one of those crisp, clear fall days.

As they pulled into the parking lot, two things stood out. There was a wayside pulpit with an intriguing message. They saw that this week's service was going to be on social action. They also saw passengers getting off a small bus. "Those people must all be from Conway," one of the women said, and they were soon over in the crowd renewing acquaintances.

"Yes, a bus brings a group from Conway and another group from Wolfeboro," they were told, "and the minister comes to us twice a month on Wednesday nights to lead us in a short services and a discussion group. We may even start helping the Conway group begin their own congregation. They are looking for rented space and a part-time minister."

"Let's walk around the building before the service begins," another woman suggested, and the group walked around towards the back admiring the plantings. The building itself looked about the same as in 2013 – in good repair but no additions. However, there was a wonderful playscape out back and it looked like there was a new meditation garden with some attractive benches in the back. "Do you remember how the children summed up the importance of UUFES in their lives? We all laughed – but it was really right on."

"You'd just be a bag of bones and stuff without your SPIRIT!"

It looks like UUFES has been working on meeting the needs of children and youth.

"Let's look at the RE space before the service," another member suggested. As they walked in, they met the RE Director.

"Yes, we've come a long way," she said, and it was clear that the place was busy. "We managed to keep that group of children that had so much fun at the retreat. As they got older, we instituted a "Neighboring Faiths" program where they visited lots of different local congregations. We also led OWL programs for older youth, and finally rented some space in the Barnstormer Building next door. Teens meet on Sunday night for a service and then pizza and music or films. They also adopt a social justice project each year, this year working with youth groups all over Mt. Washington Valley leading efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Lots of non-UU kids come as well and often their parents show up at services later. We also use the Barnstormer space for older children on Sunday morning so that the little kids can have their own place near their parents. It's a tight squeeze here but we're making it work."

“We’d better get upstairs,” one member said, so they climbed those wonderful stairs of the old school house, entered the sanctuary, and immediately felt at home. The view of the Ossipees was as beautiful as always. The pulpit looked the same with the chalice ready to be lit. And the minister that had been called in 2015 immediately came over with hugs for all. She/he was the same welcoming person that they had envisioned back in 2013, and immediately they were invited not just to stay for coffee but to visit during week.

“So much is going on here now. I’d love to be able to talk to you more.”

They took their seats and realized that the room was very full. Looking around, there were a lot more younger people than had been here in 2013 and groups of people that they knew from having breakfast at the Other Store back in 2013 but that had never been at UUFES before. An instrumental group was playing the music for gathering, and people gradually settled down for the service.

The service felt both profoundly the same but also different at the same time. All the ritual was there; the combination of intellectual and spiritual challenge and the sense of caring for each other. A new addition was a very talented choir that got everyone clapping. The choir director was clearly a popular person. Even the congregation sounded better than it had in 2013. Plus there was a wonderful sound system and the group noticed that some people who were hard of hearing had special earphones.

The theme for the morning was social action. It seemed as if the Fellowship had selected a project that had global significance but they were working collaboratively in the Valley on related local actions. The sermon was on the important principles that UUFES had kept in mind as it took on the top priority identified in the 2013 retreat: “Bringing our UU principles to life through social action.” After each principle was articulated, a member of the fellowship stood and gave an example of what they had done in the last year. The guests were impressed with the examples:

“It is important that our focus be chosen through a democratic process.”

- “It took us two years to choose our current focus. We sponsored speakers, films, small group discussions, and finally the Fellowship was ready to vote. It helped then that we chose the issue that the UUA as a whole had chosen, and so now we could collaborate with other congregations on action.”

“Our focus must be one that allows a diversity of approaches, a diversity of political opinions, and is attractive to people of very different economic means.”

- “We let the young people lead the way here. They sponsored an evening with two speakers who each approached the issue from a different perspective. It

was clear at the end that we all valued the same goal, but there were different ways that each of us could work on the issue.”

“We must continue to value members whose interests are different - providing a place for them to contribute.”

- “Our pulpit editorial and letter writing Sundays have been very popular this year with people leading us in taking action on a variety of issues. We also have kept up our tradition of having a person of the month in the Friday Mail Pouch, with members talking about their individual work on many different causes.”

“Our vision is to bring our UU principles to life through Social Action.”

- And we have. Let me tell you about the actions we have either led or participated in this year....”

The service continued with many examples and with all of the other components that the guests recognized – joys and concerns, readings, music, a time for meditation. Too soon it was time for the coffee hour.

The guests scattered during the coffee hour and heard lots of scraps of things that members were up to.

“This building is way too small. I understand that the Board is forming a building committee.”

“The largest group of our new members work in places like Walmart. We need to get involved in helping them increase their wages and benefits.”

“One of our older members has been ill but can’t afford help. Can you help by staying with her a few hours a week?”

“The adult RE group meets on Tuesday night and is going to take up studying that new book on interfaith connections. Would you like to join us?”

And so it went. The Florida guests finally got in their cars chatting enthusiastically about all the different things that these UU members cared about.

The following Tuesday, the group visited again. The minister first took them on a tour of the building. “We’re really cramped now but we are doing the best we can with our space. We rented the Barnstormer building next door two years ago, and moved our committee meetings and older RE group over there. We also have a very comfortable library and media space there. Let me show you how we redesigned

this first floor to have a commercial kitchen as well as RE space for infants and toddlers.”

The tour was impressive and on the way the group heard about the minister’s dreams. “We got a large bequest last year and the Board is talking about beginning a feasibility study for expanding this building. We’d love a social hall and the ability to bring us all back into the same building again. We’d love to have space to rent out during the week. This town really needs an adult day care program, but we need to be careful with the finances.”

“We’re also using much more diverse ways to keep our Fellowship interconnected. Back in 2013, social media was foreign to most of our members. Now we use it a lot. We sponsor on-line discussion groups on lots of different topics. All it takes is someone to agree to lead the discussion and make sure it stays on topic. Members who live farther away are much more involved now. We also share a forum with an inner city UU congregation. We still aren’t very diverse up here, but we can now be in conversation with people of a very different culture.”

“It’s hard to keep the infrastructure going with a group that is larger but still not large enough to afford all the different help we need. So we took the leadership in sponsoring a consortium of faith communities nearby to share services. We have a full-time office person working for all of us, a bookkeeper who serves many congregations, a part-time media and communications person, and we share the services of a part-time IT person to keep us all on line. We pay a little more than we did back in 2013 because we’re bigger, but we get a much better bundle of services. We also know each other better and have taken on a number of collaborative interfaith projects.”

“If there’s one other day that you all could visit, come to the farmer’s market on Saturday. It’s the same vibrant place that it was back in 2013, but we are an even larger part of the event. Spirit Art is still running for our children in the summer and the thrift shop is a big money maker. Inside there’s often a speaker on a topic of importance to our social concerns issue. Next week there will be an art show by one of our members, and our children’s choir has been the music for the market several times. Plus you can’t beat the local food!”

The conversation went on until the group was back up in the sanctuary. “Let’s light the chalice, and just have time be together for a bit longer. It’s so good to welcome back people who we still see as part of our Fellowship.”

So the chalice was lit. The group sat in companionable silence for a while thinking through both what they had always loved about UUFES that was still there and marveling at the degree to which the vision they had generated back in 2013 had come true. Then they got up, had a warm group hug, and said goodbye. It had been a wonderful trip, and the group was already talking about how they might make the same journey back next year.

