

## BECOMING “THE CHURCH OF OUR DREAMS”

### Report of the Growth Task Force First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Background and Process:** *In January 2006, the Board appointed the Growth Task Force, charging it to assess the internal and external environments, and to make recommendations regarding a plan for church growth over the next 5 years. The Task Force reviewed readings, data, surveys, and input from the congregation, and focused—not on numbers or budgets—but on becoming a vibrant “Church of Our Dreams” as the key to growth.*

**Key Areas and Recommendations:** *The Task Force identified six key areas to develop in order to maximize growth in the number of church members. For each of the six areas, the Task Force developed a clear idea of what the church should strive to accomplish, and formulated specific recommendations for achieving the vision:*

**1) Passion, Purpose, and Spirit—the Message:**

- *strong spiritual leadership*
- *integrating reason and faith*
- *bridging diverse beliefs*
- *building a sense of common purpose*
- *inspiring action for social justice*
- *distilling a concise outreach message*

**2) Powerful, Inspiring Worship Services:**

- *inspiring sermons combining intellect, spirit, and emotion*
- *worshipful, well-organized services*
- *inclusive services that are mindful of guests and that respect diversity*
- *music variety*

**3) Welcoming Everyone--All Feel They Belong:**

- *all sharing Greeter functions*
- *reducing exclusiveness*
- *enhancing Greeter functions*
- *encouraging interested guests to become members*
- *actively improving inclusiveness and diversity*
- *evaluating church accessibility*

**4) Caring for Each Other—Connections:**

- *strong pastoral care*
- *a Small Groups Committee to support and list groups*
- *promotion of small group membership*
- *expansion of the Mentorship program*
- *development of a “Neighborhood Connections” system*
- *expressing more appreciation*

**5) Serving the Community— “Hands-On” Social Action:**

- *enhancing the church’s leadership for social justice issues*

- *designating projects for special focus*
- *enhancing participation in projects*
- *improving visibility of projects*
- *strengthening the Forum*

**6) Getting the Message Out—Visibility in the Community:**

- *displaying the outreach message*
- *increased visibility of Religious Education*
- *promoting the church in the community*
- *considering professional consultation for community communication*
- *prioritization of publicity needs by the Council*
- *Communications Committee assisting Event Coordinators*
- *improved communication within the church*
- *enhancing the website*

***Making it Happen:*** *The Task Force recognizes that its recommendations—indeed growth itself—may stir controversy. Making changes also means a great deal of work. Involving stakeholders, encouraging honest dialogue, and seeking the affirmation of the congregation are important parts of launching this program for church growth.*

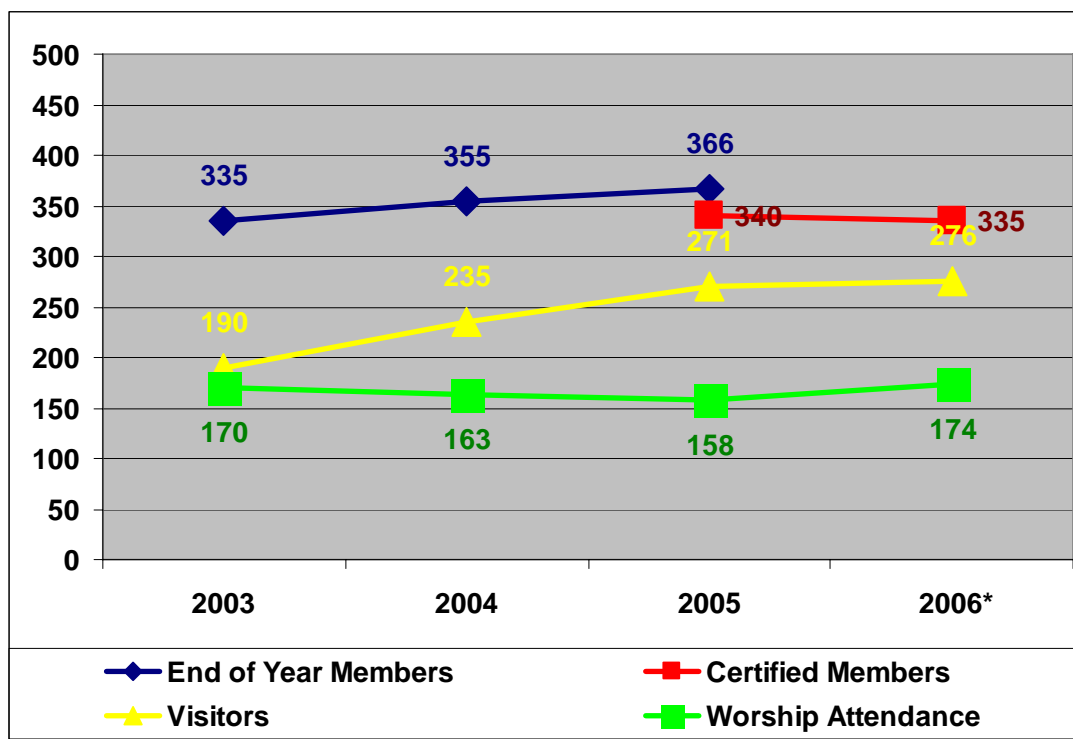
*Additional church staff will be needed to support the growing congregation. Financial growth will follow growth in numbers, and must be managed well. In addition, structured follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation will be important to implementing the Task Force recommendations. A Task Force monitoring group should continue to assess progress for the Board twice a year.*

## **BACKGROUND AND PROCESS**

The Growth Task Force grew out of the realization that membership growth was not meeting the optimistic expectations of the congregation. In January 2006, the Board appointed the Task Force, with the charge: *to assess the internal and external environments, and make recommendations to the Board regarding a plan for growth for the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio over the next 5 years.*

Task Force members included: Nevin Rupp, Barbara Rhymes, Kathy Sheridan, Brian Lyttle, Allan Kropp, Betsy Kropp, April Chase, and Alan Chase. Jan Realini served as Chair; Todd O'Neill and Vince Fonseca also served during the early meetings. Interim Minister, Rev. Eric Posa participated, as well. The Task Force held monthly meetings and considered membership and attendance data; previous surveys and consultations; and information from the denomination and other churches working on growth. In addition, the Task Force solicited input from church members and visited some growing churches.

The Task Force reviewed several readings on growth, including materials from the Unitarian Universalist Association, (*Size Transitions in UU Congregations, Congregational Growth in Unitarian Universalism, "Breakthrough" Congregations*). Additional readings were suggested by Rev. Art Severance (e.g., Dennis Hamilton's *Roadblocks to Growth*). The Task Force reviewed membership and attendance data, summarized in the following chart:



*\*Average Worship Attendance & projected Number of Guests from Jan. 1 to Dec. 14, 2006.  
N.B.: Membership decreases 2001 to 2003 likely due to careful review of rolls*

Church membership has not grown as much as we would like. Mean Worship Service attendance has been decreasing, although it rose to 181 in the first half of 2006. The number of guests\* appears to be increasing.

The Task Force reviewed the following information: 1) the 2000 Unitarian Universalist Southwest Conference Consultation report; 2) Committee on Ministry data from green cards and one-on-one interviews; 3) limited information on members who left the church; 4) comments offered to the GTF by members; and 5) results of the Ministerial Search Committee's first Congregational Profile Survey. Some of the strengths identified included being a Welcoming Congregation supportive of diversity; the youth Religious Education program; community/fellowship ("I come here for the people"); shared values; intellectual stimulation; small groups; and the music. Concerns included desires for more spirituality (balanced with the intellectual) and a greater sense of common purpose; better sermons; attracting and retaining members; enhanced social action; more involvement and connection of members; and a need to be more welcoming. Additional concerns included finances, facilities, and accessibility. In addition, each member of the Task Force visited a growing church and reported on any characteristics that were pertinent to the Task Force considerations.

The Task Force found that there is already a tremendous amount of excellent work being done by both staff and volunteers. Early Task Force discussions dealt with the key issue of whether the church really wants to grow. Growth means change, and change

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\* The term "guest" refers to a visitor or non-member, whether the person is invited by (or accompanied by) a church member, or not.

can be difficult. The Task Force recognizes the importance of addressing this issue with the congregation. It will be important that the process allow everyone to be heard, and to reflect the desires of the congregation. At the same time, it is essential not to allow a few who disagree to prevent needed change.

The Task Force decided early in its process to focus, not on member numbers or budget levels, but rather on building what could be called “the Church of Our Dreams”. Recognizing that a vibrant church is the key to growth, the Task Force outlined six key areas that it believes will attract and keep new members and old: 1) the Message; 2) Worship Services; 3) Welcoming Everyone; 4) Caring and Connections; 5) Serving the Community; and 6) Visibility.

Each of these six areas had a Task Force member “point person”, who drafted a description of what the Task Force would like to achieve, and recommendations for how to achieve it. After receiving feedback on each of the six area drafts, the components were then combined into a draft report, and shared with church leadership and stakeholders. Additional input from these sources was then incorporated into the report.

What follows is a brief description of the Task Force’s vision for each of the six areas. For each area, Task Force recommendations are offered, with the responsible entity indicated in parentheses. Recommendations felt to be of highest priority are indicated with an asterisk (\*). The Task Force Recommendations are not meant to represent a strict mandate; rather, they should serve as agreed-upon guidelines for achieving the greater goal of growth of a vital and healthy church. The final section of this report describes a process for achieving and maintaining its recommendations for growth.

### **AREA 1. PASSION, PURPOSE, AND SPIRIT—THE MESSAGE**

The core message of Unitarian Universalism is one of freedom, reason, and individual responsibility for belief. Our members have diverse beliefs. The Congregational Profile Survey conducted by the Ministerial Search Committee found that most members (80%) identify with Humanism<sup>†</sup>, and many identify with Mysticism<sup>‡</sup> (56%), Naturalistic Theism<sup>§</sup> (52%), and/or a variety of other beliefs. Some members believe in a supernatural God, while many do not, or are unsure.

We come together in a loving church community to seek religious truth and meaning, to care for each other, and to serve the wider community. Our message of faith compatible with reason, religious tolerance, and principled action is critically important in the modern world.

Articulating the “message” of our non-creedal faith is challenging because our beliefs are so diverse, but is nevertheless essential to growth. Our message should be clear

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<sup>†</sup> “I believe that human beings are responsible for ‘goodness’ and ‘meaning’, and that we must rely on one another for support”

<sup>‡</sup> “I find support and value in the fullness and connectedness of all things”

<sup>§</sup> “The powers traditionally attributed to a supernatural deity are inherent in the natural world, which thus elicits my respect and devotion”

and prominent to attract new people. And our message must not be just words. It should be how we live, how we treat each other, and how we serve others.

The Growth Task Force believes that there is great potential for our church to become a spiritual “home” for many more people, both for those dissatisfied with other teachings, as well as for those unaffiliated with a church who seek spiritual meaning—and a loving community—that is compatible with science and reason.

Our message should speak to those who believe in a supernatural god, as well as to those who do not. The right spiritual leadership can help us navigate this path, explore deep questions, integrate reason and faith, call us to be our best selves, and build our sense of common purpose. Our message should bring our seven Principles into focus and explore their meaning for our lives. Our message should inspire action for social justice in our community; our church should inspire us—and others in San Antonio—to stand up and speak out about important issues of our time.

A concise outreach message should be distilled and displayed for the public (e.g., “Faith, Reason, Community”). This would not be the only message of the church, nor should it be unchallenged or unchanging. But it would be a succinct, accurate, and attractive message to use in the newspaper, in the yellow pages, on business cards and brochures, and on a banner on the side of the church.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- \* 1.1 In the search for a settled minister, seek someone who (Ministerial Search Committee):
  - a. Can provide strong spiritual leadership
  - b. Is committed to growth of the church
  - c. Will provide sermons that balance the deeply spiritual with the intellectual
  - d. Can help bridge differences in beliefs
  - e. Can help all to feel included
  - f. Can help develop our sense of common purpose
  - g. Can inspire us to work for social justice
- 1.2 Plan sermons and services that explore deep spiritual questions; integrate reason and faith; speak to both those who believe in a supernatural god and those who do not; call us to be our best selves; build our sense of common purpose; and address translating faith into action. (Worship Committee, Minister)
- 1.3 Plan companion small groups, adult and youth education classes for discussion and processing of these themes (Adult Learning Committee, Small Groups Committee, Director of Religious Education, Youth Religious Education Council)
- \* 1.4 Charge the Council with developing an attractive and concise outreach message for the newspaper, in banners, on the website, and in other media. The outreach message should be evaluated yearly. (Council, Communications Committee)
- 1.5 Evaluation: the Committee on Ministry periodically surveys the membership for satisfaction about services, sermons, programs, and messages (Committee on Ministry)

## **AREA 2. POWERFUL, INSPIRING WORSHIP SERVICES**

Worship services are the heart of a church, and they should touch us emotionally and spiritually, as well as challenging us intellectually. Services should help us experience deeply what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, build our sense of community, and help us in our search for spiritual truth. Services should inspire us to stand up for social justice and to live out our faith in our daily lives. Ideally, each person should feel touched by each worship service.

Many creative and dedicated people have done excellent work in this area. The minister, Worship Committee, the Minister of Music, the Choir, and many more have made great contributions.

Worship services should be well organized and professionally delivered; they should be a showcase of the best we offer, and a draw for guests and members alike. Everything in the service should be conducted with guests and newcomers in mind because the services are guests' introduction to our church—and often to Unitarian Universalism. Other religions should never be ridiculed in our services. While we can disagree with other faiths—and feel strongly about our differences with them—we should not make fun of them.

Sermons are the heart of the worship service, and they should be something that few in the church would want to miss. Sermons should capture attention, stimulate both intellectual and spiritual growth, and move us to action. Sermons should be original, varied, timely, and delivered in an effective manner.

In order to attract more young adults and minorities (especially Hispanics, but other minorities, as well) to the church, services should seek to speak to them and to help them feel comfortable.

The music in our church is a great treasure and should continue. Some increased variety is desirable, especially adding some contemporary music. Hymns should be as “singable” as possible.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- \* 2.1 In the search for a settled minister, seek someone who can (Ministerial Search Committee):
  - a. Provide powerful and inspiring sermons, combining intellectual stimulation with spiritual challenge and emotional connection
  - b. Appeal to a diverse audience, respecting different beliefs.
- 2.2 Maintain a worshipful setting (Worship Committee, Minister), for example:
  - a. Discontinue open announcements, with the worship leaders including only essential announcements as part of the service
  - b. Discourage applause, with clear guidelines for exceptions
  - c. Assure that the foyer is quiet during the service (Ushers)
- 2.3 Assure that services are professional and well-organized (Worship Committee, Minister)
  - a. Services should begin and end on time
  - b. Services balance ritual and continuity of format with variety
  - c. Consider having “Worship Associates”, trained lay members of the church who are an integral part of the service

- \* 2.4 Services should be inclusive, and mindful of guests and newcomers (Worship Committee, Minister)
  - a. Abbreviations and insider language are not used
  - b. The Order of Service explains the service well for guests and newcomers
  - c. Other religions and beliefs are respected, even if we disagree with them
  - d. Solicit feedback about the services from young adults and minorities (including racial, ethnic, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender minorities)
  - e. Involve minority members and young adults in the services
- 2.5 Include a variety of music (Minister of Music, Worship Committee)
  - a. Include some contemporary music
  - b. Invite suggestions for music from young adult and minority members
- 2.6 Evaluate yearly the effectiveness of services by surveying members and soliciting feedback from guests (Worship Committee, Minister)

### **AREA 3. WELCOMING EVERYONE—ALL FEEL THEY BELONG**

A great deal of excellent work in this area is under way. The Membership Committee already has improved and expanded its activities, including improvements to the guest and membership processes, and a new mentorship program for new members.

To maximize growth, it is important that guests and new members alike feel welcome and that they belong. Guests should be welcomed warmly, invited to join us for coffee or soup lunch after the service, and to visit again. Each guest should have conversations with at least two people, and should be personally invited to visit again and get involved in the church.

Welcoming everyone means we welcome conservatives as well as liberals, Christians as well as non-Christians, people of color as well as whites/Anglos, young as well as old, new as well as long-time members, and those looking for a spiritual and emotional message, as well as those looking for intellectual stimulation.

Being truly welcoming means taking care not to ridicule other religions—even those with which we may disagree. It means always being mindful of guests in our midst. It means actively seeking feedback and involvement from those we want to attract to our church, including young adults; African Americans; Hispanics; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people; and people with disabilities. Welcoming everyone requires work to address issues of prejudice and racism.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- \* 3.1 Make Everyone a Greeter (Worship & Membership Committees, Minister)
  - a. Periodically focus on the importance of hospitality/welcoming in the worship service, newsletter, and other communications
  - b. Periodically remind the congregation of every member's Greeter role, and the critical 10 minutes before and after the Worship Service for greeting
  - c. Strive to assure that each guest meets at least two people, and is personally invited to participate and to return
  - d. Avoid doing church business (or holding Congregational Meetings) immediately after the service

- e. Encourage all members to wear their nametags, and place the nametag rack in a location convenient to the sanctuary
- f. Develop specific instructions and programs/practice to help all members be more welcoming to guests and new members
- \* 3.2 Promote a truly welcoming atmosphere, and reduce exclusiveness (Worship Committee, Minister, all congregants)
  - a. Everything in the service is done mindful of guests and newcomers
  - b. Show respect for all religions, even if they are not what we have chosen
  - c. Use no insider language or abbreviations in the worship service, Order of Service, Announcements, Newsletter, etc. Spell it out and say it out!
  - d. Do not assume that all agree with certain political policies. Consider whether politics in the service may make people feel excluded
  - e. In the service and/or the Order of Service, invite guests to coffee or soup lunch, and invite them to visit again. Be clear that coffee and lunch are free for newcomers
  - f. Order of Service explains things for newcomers, lets all know what to expect
  - g. Do not charge for coffee
- 3.3 Enhance Greeter functions (Membership Committee)
  - a. Increase the number of greeters per service; include young adults and teens
  - b. Greeters function after, as well as before, the service
  - c. Continue to call guests to answer any questions and invite them back (Minister, President of the Congregation)
  - d. Develop Guest Packets and a literature rack for the foyer
  - e. Improve function of Sanctuary foyer: de-clutter; facilitate traffic flow; display children's artwork
  - f. Improve connecting with guests and assisting them to the coffee hour or FUUnd Lunch after the service—use personal invitation
- 3.4 Encourage interested guests to become members (Membership Committee, Adult Education, Small Groups Committee, Minister)
  - a. Mention in the service and/or Order of Service how to become a member
  - b. Hold once-monthly "Meet the Minister" sessions for newcomers after church
  - c. Consider modeling orientation classes after "Roots and Wings" of All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington DC; or "Roots" and "Branches" classes of All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, OK
- 3.5 Actively improve diversity and inclusiveness with regard to minorities, including Hispanics, African Americans, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender People, Young Adults, and others (Membership Committee, Board, Minister)
  - a. Actively seek input on our services and activities from minorities and young adults (Worship and Membership Committees)
  - b. Consider structured programs to encourage diversity and prevent unintentional racism and ethnocentricity. Examples are "Journey Toward Wholeness" (UUA program against racism); "Beyond Categorical Thinking" program; and a refresher process for our Welcoming Congregation Status
  - c. Increase visibility of diversity within the church: pictures on the website, minority and young adult members participate in the service
  - d. Include youth religious education activities on diversity and inclusiveness (Director of Religious Education, Religious Education Council)
- 3.6 Evaluate the church facilities and services for accessibility (Membership Committee, Member Care)

- 3.7 Evaluate yearly the effectiveness of these efforts by monitoring numbers of new members, surveying members, soliciting feedback from guests (Membership Committee)

#### **AREA 4. CARING FOR EACH OTHER—CONNECTIONS**

Worship services may attract guests, but it is the connections that keep people coming to church. Meaningful relationships can be formed through participation in Sunday mornings; in volunteer work for the church; in social activities and social action endeavors. Small groups offer especially effective opportunities for meaningful connection.

Being truly connected—and caring for each other—means that we feel connected, communicate well, and help to take care of each other through joys and troubles. Much is already being done by the Minister, the Member Care committee, and many small groups and individuals. In addition to the Minister and the Member Care committee, effective care requires many in the congregation to participate. However, our geographic dispersion and our busy lives make it challenging to know who needs support and to provide it.

In order to build and maintain deep and lasting connections, we should develop our system of small groups. Meaningful involvement can be fostered by many types of small groups, including committees, classes, interest groups, covenant groups, and others. In addition, neighborhood or area-based groups can serve as subcommittees to help with member care.

Ideally, most members would belong to at least one small group, and new groups would be formed to meet needs and interests. Information about groups should be up-to-date and easily accessible. Small group function should be supported by the institutional organization of the church.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- 4.1 In the search for a settled minister, seek someone who can provide (Ministerial Search Committee):
- a. excellent pastoral care
  - b. leadership and training for “covenant” and other small groups
- \* 4.2 Develop an institutional mechanism for support of small groups, such as a Small Groups Committee (under Fellowship), which would promote small group participation in the church:
- a. Serve as a clearinghouse for listing small groups, their activities, membership, and contact information
  - b. Clarify small group terminology (covenant groups, chalice circles, affinity groups, interest groups, etc.)
  - c. Assess the need/desire for additional groups, e.g., covenant groups specifically to foster group members’ spiritual growth
  - d. With the Minister, organize and train group leaders/facilitators
- 4.3 Promote small group membership (Small Groups, Member Care, Membership Committees)

- a. Consider a “Get More Connected” campaign and a “Connections Sunday”
  - b. encourage small group leaders/members to extend personal invitations to participate
- 4.4 Develop the Mentorship program (Membership Committee)
- a. Mentors assist new members to get “connected”— a six-month timetable
  - b. Extend the Mentorship program to reconnect established members
- 4.5 Develop an effective system to assure that member needs are recognized and responded to (Member Care Committee, Small Groups Committee)
- a. Foster awareness of members’ geographic locations, e.g., include in the Directory a list of members by zip code (Church Administrator)
  - b. Recruit volunteers to communicate regularly with members in their area and forward concerns/needs to the Member Care Committee or Minister
  - c. Use this network to help get established members more connected
  - d. Assess the need/desire for neighborhood small groups (Small Groups Committee)
- \* 4.6 Foster a culture of gratitude and appreciation (Membership Committee, assisted by Minister, Board, Council, Member Care)
- a. Develop methods to encourage “Thank You” notes for members who give of their time, energy, or resources
  - b. Periodically thank people in the service verbally and with tokens of gratitude (e.g., a plaque with church photograph)
- 4.7 Evaluate yearly the effectiveness of these efforts by monitoring member numbers and satisfaction with groups and with Member Care (Small Groups Committee, Member Care)

## **AREA 5. SERVING THE COMMUNITY—“HANDS-ON” SOCIAL ACTION**

Service to the community and working for social justice are key reasons for church involvement for many church members. Fortunately, our church already has several ongoing Social Action endeavors, and a dedicated Social Action Committee.

Our church should provide leadership for the local community about issues of social justice. The First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio should be known for speaking out about important issues of our time and for standing up for justice.

The community work that our church does should be well-known throughout the congregation and visible in the wider community, as well. Ideally, Social Action activities should be an integral part of the church’s identity, provide a sense of mission and purpose, and be a source of pride and solidarity. All members of the congregation, including those with children, should have ready access to involvement with Social Action activities, preferably with opportunities for “hands-on” involvement—a way to “walk the talk” of our faith.

A special focus on one or two Social Action projects can serve to enhance the effectiveness of these projects by recruiting additional resources and volunteers from the congregation. Projects designated for special focus should be chosen (or designed) to maximize: participation of the congregation; impact on the community;

and visibility in the community. Projects chosen for special focus should fit well with Unitarian Universalist principles, our church's resources, and community needs. Strategies for maximizing impact and involvement can be developed by the Social Action Committee, with input from the congregation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- 5.1 Coordinate with the minister to enhance the church's social justice leadership potential in the community
- \* 5.2 Each year, designate one or two projects for special focus and involve as many church members (adults and children) as possible (Social Action Committee)
  - a. Special focus can be renewed yearly, if the project is effective. Such continuity can build effectiveness and involvement
  - b. Special focus could involve joint projects with other churches, or be chosen to coincide with national Unitarian Universalist initiatives
  - c. Invite intergenerational involvement through the Young Adult Group, Director of Religious Education, Youth Religious Education Council, Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU), and the middle school youth group
  - d. Emphasize use of personal invitation to recruit volunteers
- 5.3 Communicate with the congregation (in "eye-catching" ways), including contact information and how to get involved in projects (Social Action Committee)
  - a. Methods include: Newsletter & Announcements; Website; Brochures to distribute and post; Banners; Highlight in the worship services
- 5.4 Coordinate with the Communications Committee to enhance visibility of Social Action projects, both within the church and in the wider community (Social Action Committee, Communications Committee)
- 5.5 Reinstate and strengthen the Forum (perhaps once a month, to start) to showcase Social Action issues and projects, with vigorous marketing to the community (Social Action Committee)
- 5.6 Annual evaluation of Social Action activities, including impact on the community, level of participation, and feedback from the congregation (Social Action Committee)

**AREA 6. GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT—VISIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY**

Considerable work already helps to "get the message out" through enhanced signage and an improved website. In addition, Public Radio announcements, yellow pages and newspaper listings, Social Action activities, special events, and outreach at colleges and military bases make our church visible.

To maximize growth, the church's message must be clear and the church and its activities should be highly visible in the community. The church's concise outreach message (e.g., "Faith, Reason, Community") should be used in church promotional efforts and displayed prominently in connection with church projects and events.

Increasing the visibility of the church's excellent Religious Education programs for children, youth, and adults can help to attract young families. Use of a brief and appealing Religious Education outreach message can be effective on the website, in

the newspaper, and in the yellow pages. An example might be: "Open Minds, Loving Hearts, Helping Hands."

Worship services should be so spiritually and intellectually stimulating, that members invite their friends to church services and events. Services can also be promoted using the outreach message and key media.

Other church activities and programs should be made more visible in the community, as well. Social Action projects can "shine" and attract new people, as can the church's special events. Brochures and information about the church should be visible and easily available at area colleges and military bases, and our church should be represented at appropriate on-campus events. Visibility and outreach can also be achieved through activities with other like-minded groups in the community.

The Task Force recognizes that the Communications Committee currently has fewer volunteers than are needed. Efforts will need to be made to recruit volunteers and to build the Committee and its function.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Highest Priority Items marked with a \*):**

- \* 6.1 Display the church's outreach message (e.g., "Faith, Reason, Community") prominently (Communications Committee)
  - a. Building banner, website, brochures, newspaper, yellow pages, etc.
  - b. "Business cards" provided to church leaders, event coordinators for distribution in community and at events
  - c. Developing a wayside pulpit, in collaboration with the settled minister
- \* 6.2 Increase visibility of Religious Education programs (Communications Committee, Youth Religious Education Council, Adult Education Committee)
  - a. Display a concise Religious Education outreach message (e.g., "Open Minds, Loving Hearts, Helping Hands")
  - b. Newspaper, website, business cards, brochures, other methods
- 6.3 Promote the church in the community (Communications Committee, Minister, Membership Committee, Young Adult Group)
  - a. Media efforts: news coverage, newspapers, Public Radio, etc.
  - b. Explore joint efforts with other churches/organizations, e.g., San Antonio Liberal Spiritual Association (SALSA)
  - c. Encourage members to invite friends and family to church services and events (Minister, Worship and Membership Committees)
  - d. Consider efforts for outreach to San Antonio's large and diverse Hispanic population, and to young adults
- 6.4 Consider professional consultation to develop a Community Communication Plan. This would require a budget, if expertise is not available from volunteers. (Communications Committee, with Board approval) The Plan would include:
  - a. Community promotion of the church and its events
  - b. Outreach to populations likely to be interested in the church
- \* 6.5 The Council serves as a clearinghouse for activities and events needing publicity outside the church (Communications Committee, Events Coordinators, Council)
  - a. Council identifies & prioritizes activities needing community promotion
  - b. Unresolved competing priorities are brought to the Board for approval

- 6.6 Communications Committee assists Event Coordinators with community promotion and internal communication (Communications Committee)
  - a. Provide all Event Coordinators with a Communications Checklist/Guide
  - b. Assist Event Coordinators, as needed
- 6.7 Improve communication within the church (Communications Committee, Newsletter Coordinator, Church Office Administrator)
  - a. Provide guidance (e.g., in the Newsletter and Announcements, at the Bridging Retreat, in the Communications Checklist) for members on how to communicate within the church
  - b. Assist Committee Chairs and Events Coordinators to utilize internal communications avenues effectively
  - c. Avoid "insider language" and abbreviations in the Newsletter, Announcements, List-serves, and everywhere
- 6.8 Enhance the website design for maximum attractiveness to potential visitors (Communications Committee, Webmaster)
  - a. Solicit feedback from young adults about website design
  - b. Use the church outreach message and the Religious Education outreach message
  - c. Use pictures of diverse members and activities
- 6.9 Annual evaluation of the effectiveness of internal and external communication (Communications Committee)

### **ADOPTION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND MONITORING PROGRESS OF THE GROWTH TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Achieving successful implementation of all the Task Force recommendations will require a great deal of commitment, work, and patience. This plan involves the church leadership, Minister, staff, and the entire congregation, in a long-term effort that requires significant changes in church functions. Change can be stressful, and we need to be flexible, honest, and forgiving with each other.

This Growth Plan was developed at a time when the church did not have a settled minister. The Growth Task Force anticipates that our new settled minister, when he or she arrives, will provide additional ideas, emphasis, and leadership for the Growth Plan. We look forward to a dynamic process that will be flexible enough to incorporate the strengths and vision of our new minister.

Important components of an effective Growth Plan include organizational infrastructure and financial support. There is concern that church volunteers have been overworked and thus risk burnout. Better organization will be needed to support volunteers as the church grows. Hiring staff to support the volunteer activities of the congregation will need to be considered. In addition, leadership training is needed for volunteers.

Financial growth will follow growth in numbers. The Growth Task Force anticipates that building "the Church of Our Dreams" through the six areas of the Growth Plan will attract guests and new members, inspire and retain existing members, and result in increasing financial resources for the church. The recent Stewardship Campaign reflected the members' increasing financial commitment to the church. However,

financial management and planning will need to continue to be improved. Both staff leadership and lay leadership components (i.e., the Finance Committee) are needed to guide and manage the church's finances in realistic and effective ways.

The Task Force has suggested responsible entities along with each of its recommendations. Wherever possible, the Task Force assigns responsibility and tasks to existing committees. For the Caring and Connections area, however, a new entity was felt to be needed, with a new Small Groups Committee suggested.

It will be important to have a structured mechanism to follow up, monitor, and evaluate the Growth Plan. An evaluation component is included in each of the six areas, and this will give the responsible parties for each area a structured way to monitor progress in their area.

The Growth Task Force should be continued for at least a year or two, in order to monitor overall progress of the Growth Plan and keep track of progress in each of the six areas. A representative of the Growth Task Force should attend Council meetings and report to the Council twice a year. The Growth Task Force, the Finance Task Force, and the Long Range Planning/Strategic Planning Committees should be coordinated. Consideration should be given to uniting these entities eventually into a Planning/Futures Committee.

In addition, individual members of the Growth Task Force will be encouraged to join or work with the various Committees in order to assist with carrying out the recommendations in their areas of interest.

The effectiveness of this plan and these recommendations is not guaranteed. There are no studies that demonstrate without question that these recommendations, if carried out, will increase the size of the congregation. These recommendations are based on some assumptions, as well as on information available to the Task Force from the denomination, growth experts, other churches, and from thoughtful church members. In the end, the effectiveness of this plan will be revealed by whether the congregation indeed grows in numbers.

This Task Force Report is presented to the Board for adoption. The Task Force recommends that, if it is adopted, that the church hold a ceremony during a worship service in which the congregation affirms its commitment to growth. This process will allow the congregation to embrace the plan and take responsibility for its implementation and success.

This is the mission of our faith:  
To teach the fragile art of hospitality;  
To revere both the critical mind and the generous heart;  
To prove that diversity need not mean divisiveness;  
And to witness to all that we must hold the whole world in our hands.  
--William F. Schultz