

**First Parish Unitarian Universalist
2019- 2020 Annual Vision Goal #1**

THE COFFE HOUR EXPERIENCE

**Statement of Basis
May 9, 2019**

Vision Goal #1: Improve the Coffee Hour Experience to Promote Congregant Retention and Engagement

Basis of Need

At least one consultant has made the statement that churches rise or fall on their coffee hour. This is where both new and repeat church attendees gage whether our church will provide to them that fundamental emotional connection we all seek, and then whether they will be able to be part of the real workings of the church, or remain just an outsider drinking coffee. Many who have attended our church have shared their experiences of standing alone at Coffee Hour, even after they've come several times, and others who have come repeatedly say they have no idea how to get involved in Chalice Group or committees, feeling instead like participation and leadership is a "closed shop". This experience leads to a diminished level of engagement and too often, to an eventual cessation of church attendance. While certainly not universal, this experience is reported frequently enough, and is so counter to our intentions and values as a church and faith, that it warrants special attention as a Vision Goal for 2019.

Objective of Vision Goal

This Vision Goal seeks increase the engagement of congregants by improving their social experience at Coffee Hour as well as by increasing the visibility of and access to church activities. Welcoming and friendly behavior that is genuine, consistent, and extended to any lone individual at Coffee Hour will create and nurture the community that so many of our new people seek, and which our established members cherish. Individuals who feel welcomed and accepted are more eager to increase their participation in church functions and service activities, so this initiative is paired with a focus on making entry into organizational and FIA activities easy and quick, so that enthusiasm can quickly find a purpose. The ultimate objective is to increase the pool of enthusiastic new recruits for both church functions and FIA by making sure that our newer congregants are embraced and truly welcomed into a rich, accessible, and transparent church organization.

Condition to be Achieved

Success will be reflected by the elimination of reports and observations of new and returning congregants standing alone and ignored during Coffee Hour. Success may also be measured by an "on the floor" assessment of the ease with which a new attendant can identify key opportunities and activities such as Chalice Groups, Teams, and FIA activities during the same coffee hour experience, either through (for example) organized, printed, up-to-date resources or the presence of an individual at a staffed "Get Involved" table at Coffee Hour. Additionally, interviews with new congregants can provide insight into the success of efforts in both arenas. However, since the feeling of being truly welcomed both as a person (by being included in conversations) and as a participant in church activities (by our efforts to make joining in easy) is foundational to a motivation to join, the ultimate measure of success in this area will be a growing number of active and engaged members.

**First Parish Unitarian Universalist
2019- 2020 Annual Vision Goal #2**

A TWELVE-MONTH CHURCH

**Statement of Basis
May 9, 2019**

Vision Goal #2: Have year-round services beginning in the 2020 calendar year

Basis of Need

Each spring, a number of congregants express concern and, in some cases, dismay that the church will be closing for about 6 weeks. Many of these people depend on First Parish to fulfill their spiritual needs, provide comfort if they are in a difficult position or are seeking a family to help them overcome their loneliness. When we close for over a month in the summer, there is a sense of emptiness in these people and First Parish is not meeting its mission to nurture the spirit of all who come here. Since we are the only UU church in this region which does not have year round services, these people are left to wonder why we are “abandoning” them while every other church would be there for them.

In addition to leaving these congregants with a sense their needs are not being met, First Parish is also sending the wrong message to people who first come to us in the late spring seeking a spiritual home only to be told not to return until August while we go on vacation. With other UU churches in the area being open all year, it is very easy for those people to look elsewhere for a spiritual home. This puts us at risk of losing potential new members.

The interest in some form of year-round service was mentioned by participants in the visioning workshops which were completed during the information gathering stage for setting the visioning goals of First Parish so this goal is consistent with input from the congregation.

Objective of the Vision Goal

The primary objective of this vision goal is to ensure First Parish is doing all it can to fulfill two of the three items identified in its mission statement, to nurture the spirit and to grow in community.

In providing year-round services, we will nurture the spirit by ensuring everyone who is part of our church will have uninterrupted access to all that worshipping here provides. When we close in the summer, during that time we are denying our members and guests the spiritual support, comforting or the family connections they seek.

Attaining this vision goal will serve the mission of growing in community by being accessible year round to people who are looking for connections to others, providing a place for more summer visitors to come join us, and fostering deeper bonds between people who first meet in the spring. By not having a 6 week hiatus between meeting someone new and reconnecting with that person, stronger bonds will develop which may not develop otherwise.

Finally, as a secondary objective, being open all year should increase membership for the reasons mentioned above.

Condition to be Achieved

This goal will be achieved when year round services begin during the 2020 calendar year. This will require the formation of a small group of people to look at everything which needs to be done to achieve this goal. This “exploratory” group will be formed and begin its work during the winter and spring of 2019. It will need to work with Christina, the worship committee and any other individuals or groups they identify as necessary to this process. Monitoring of the progress toward this goal will require obtaining regular updates from this exploratory group during the remainder of the 2018-19 church year and throughout all of the 2019-20 church year up until implementation of summer services in July 2020.

**First Parish Unitarian Universalist
2019- 2020 Annual Vision Goal #3**

ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS

**Statement of Basis
May 9, 2019**

Vision Goal #3: Enhanced Communications Activities

Basis of Need

As a vibrant and growing church in the heart of the city serving its community, it is vital that the work that is done at First Parish be made known far and wide. Those who put the great effort to be heavily involved with our congregation may know of events by knowing where to look, whom to ask or how to simply be where the action is. The objective fact is that time and time again far too many of our own members, let alone visitors and the community at large, are left unaware of the events and programming put on by, or in partnership with, the church.

Top notch performances, Concerts for a Cause, Faith in Action events, diversity trainings and more are often presented to more empty seats than should ever be the case. If we fail to adequately utilize the various means accessible to make our work known to the wider community, we are, pardon the pun, merely preaching to the choir.

Objective of the Vision Goal

The primary objective of this vision goal is to help First Parish fulfill its mission to nurture the spirit and grow in community.

In ensuring our message and our programming is heard, seen and experienced by a larger subset of our internal and external audience, we will fulfill the mission of nurturing the spirit by affording a wider population access to our fulfilling, empowering and transcendent activities.

As we utilize multiple mediums to notify and engage our neighbors, we will undoubtedly fulfill our mission to grow in community. As we interact with and engage a wider and more diverse population, our powerful message of inclusion will enlarge the First Parish footprint.

A positive byproduct of engaging a wider audience means that our efforts will likely lead to increased participation in Sunday services, elevated attendance at special events and a real possibility of new members who would donate their time, talent and treasure to our faith community.

Condition to be Achieved

During the first year of implementation of enhanced communications strategies, staff, church leaders and volunteers will identify and implement existing ways to reach out to the community via: earned media, message boards, community events listings, local publications web forums and more. The team will also explore the best ways to communicate internally to our membership and enact systems to meet the goal. Other tasks may include engaging donated and low cost subject matter expert services for marketing and electronic transmission of Sunday services and events. Success will be measured by assessing the implementation of initial outreach measures as well as putting in place the foundation for future communications activities.