

Summary of ideas generated at house meetings and host/facilitators feedback session



Nurturing our Roots and Branches
Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Overall, in all those pages of visions and wishes, we found the greatest passion and energy around the notion of strengthening our community:

“Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church wishes to be a cross-generational, interconnected, larger and more diverse community.”

Everything else seemed secondary to that vision. For example, *there was great enthusiasm for building and grounds improvements, but it was most often expressed as a means to the end of strengthening community.* Similarly, discussions of worship, ministry, RE, and even Social Action seemed to place the greatest emphasis on the ways in which they serve to strengthen our interconnections and build our community. Conversely, we expressed regret at the “silos” we often end up creating.

Is this because we take for granted our more basic goals like learning and sharing values and translating them into action in the wider world? Or perhaps it is because, at this moment, true community seems such a valuable and endangered phenomenon. With strong community, we can do so much in the world; without it we feel as though we can do very little.

The underlying mood of all the suggestions was: **Try it!** Be comfortable with experimenting. Ask for feedback regularly - keeping what works and changing what doesn't.

Transition Team:

Nancy Cunningham

Jaime Eller

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The ideas generated at the house meetings were broken down by the Transition Team into groups of similar ideas. The Board of Trustees then divided the groups into two categories, one with *ideas already being addressed* and the other with *additional ideas for exploration*.

Ideas already being addressed:

1. Experiment with changing worship services and offering alternative services, for example:
 - Have a single service once a month
 - Different days and/or times of services
 - Set-up sanctuary space differently
 - Change the format and content (ex) coffeehouse approach
 - Hold summer services outside
 - Diversify music and participation to appeal to a wider audience
 - Continue strong lay-led worship
 - Option for spoken joys and sorrows at each service; written down for follow-up
 - Invite community guest speakers and spiritual leaders (ministers, rabbis, monks, gospel)
 - Invite immigrants to do a service
 - Collect feedback, comments, surveys

The Minister, Worship Arts Team, Music Director, and members of the Worship Committee have started working on this.

2. Hire a minister who...
 - ... is committed to and experienced in anti-racism,
 - ... is a minister or color &/or one who relates well to a diverse population,
 - ... is someone collaborative, not controlling, about shared ministry, and
 - relates well to children.

 - We also may want to support the minister with an assistant or intern minister or "lay ministers."

A search committee will be appointed this spring to undertake the recruitment process for our next settled minister; these ideas will be passed on to the search committee.

3. Have regular congregation vision sessions; annual house meetings.

The Board will explore these ideas further.

4. Improve our communication technologies...

... for outreach: Facebook and newer channels

Erica Bartlett has been working on optimizing our Facebook and website presence for the past several months and will expand that work this spring to include newer channels. In learning to do this work, she has used the

consulting services of a Portland-based social media expert and has also been helped by Clay Atkinson and a volunteer advertising consultant. She would welcome the opportunity to train and work with other members of the Congregation on social media; please speak with her if interested.

... for worship: sound system, video, voice-to-text for hearing impaired

Diane Oberbeck is currently recruiting Congregation members with expertise in this area to do a needs assessment and possibly request proposals from local A-V companies. If you're interested in being part of this team, please speak with her.

... to facilitate remote meetings: Skype, Zoom, etc.

... telephone/voicemail system

If you have expertise in either of these two areas please speak with Diane Oberbeck.

Additional areas for exploration:

1. Participation by children and youth in shared ministry, *for example*:
 - More youth attendance at services so they hear and see what it's like
 - Hold youth groups at another time (Sunday evening?) to allow Sunday morning participation
 - Involve non-parents and people from the wider community in the RE program
 - Improve mentoring program; off-site mentoring activities
 - Invite occasional Senior Youth Group help in other RE classes, or childcare at meetings, or clean-up help at potlucks (this suggestion came from SYG!)
 - ASK youth how to make them feel more integral to church functions

2. Cross-generational community building, *for example*:
 - Host events to bring participants in both services together
 - Focus on Sunday morning activities, when we're already here
 - We need Sanctuary to be available between services
 - Add ½ hour between services to allow for a communal coffee hour
 - Foster conversations between adults of different generations
 - Accessible church directory with pictures
 - Have mentors for kids, like the "sharing friends" of prior years
 - Some structure to the gathering can help to provide comfort
 - Engaging kids in service requires "doing church" differently
 - Experiment with worship attendance cross-over between services, perhaps monthly
 - Food on Sundays is a great inducement to participation
 - Caring Connection
 - Buddy system for visitors for several Sundays
 - Arrange/provide transportation to events, services
 - Follow-up program for new or missing members
 - Poll congregation: "how are you most comfortable communicating?"
 - Have a "suggestion box" in some form
 - Community dinners dances, movies
 - A women's group
 - Meet-ups for families with children and for parents, with childcare
 - Fun Squad
 - Open up existing groups to be more welcoming and inclusive

3. Outreach and expansion into external community, *for example*:
 - Host community-focused events (films, talks)
 - Look for other like-minded groups outside of our congregation
 - Offer activities attractive to people of color or refugees
 - Partner with diverse organizations for social as well as social justice activities
 - Explore training on diversity and inclusion
 - Develop RE engagement with kids from other congregations
 - Minister with skills and experience with diverse groups

- Reach out to groups that use the church, other spiritual communities, the university population (consider college radio station), “New Mainers,” seniors
 - Provide transportation
 - Generate effective publicity by disseminating information with help from other groups (e.g. other Family Promise participants), social media presence (in addition to Facebook), targeted advertising, using church nametags out in the community
4. More use of outdoor space, *for example*:
- Develop a plan for our 6.5 acres
 - Develop a maintenance plan for our landscape
 - Play music outside
 - Expand outdoor seating areas; more seating for adults by playground
 - Fire pit or heat lamp for colder weather
 - Develop a community garden
 - Develop a sacred space to spread members’ ashes
5. Enhanced interior space, *for example*:
- Bigger sanctuary to accommodate all attendees at one service and allow for growth (and increase parking so it is not a constraint)
 - Separate fellowship hall
 - Use a space outside the church to meet some needs, like meeting all together
 - Visit places like The Pointe which use facilities differently
 - Build, borrow or share with First Parish or other community churches
 - Arts and culture program to beautify our spaces – can be done inexpensively
 - Redefine sanctuary with art, light (esp. controlling outside light)
 - Redefine the memorial room as a more intimate spiritual space available anytime; e.g. meditation, sharing.
 - Increase accessibility for those with disabilities, including hearing and sight
 - Cozy spaces for small group conversations
 - Windows in hallways and skylights
 - Integrate indoor/outdoor space
 - Open up foyer/hallway space to reduce crowding
 - More windows &/or doors to woods from sanctuary
 - Keep church cleaner
 - Paint colorful walls
 - Labyrinth in sanctuary, a la Augusta UU church
6. Grow financial resources to improve our facilities, *for example*:
- Encourage stewardship and hire minister with fundraising skills and energy
 - Raise money through legacy giving, grant writings
 - Focus on spiritual aspect of giving; generosity
 - Hire fundraising consultant
 - Borrow fundraising ideas: Hannaford rewards, “Dinner-anywhere-in-the-world” raffle, etc.
 - Air BnB in our homes with money going to A2U2
 - Improve rental income from our space via better marketing, commercial kitchen