



NORTH PARISH VISIONING TEAM

FINAL REPORT - DELIVERED SPRING 2013

CONNECTION • GROWTH • SERVICE

The purpose of the conversation groups led by the Visioning Team was to get a sense of what our members value about our congregation and where we want to be as a community in the future. The feedback expresses an acknowledgement of who we are and dreams of what North Parish can become.

The information from these groups will be used to revise our mission statement and will be the basis of future strategic planning.

We're pleased to provide our findings based on twenty Visioning Conversation groups held between June 5 and November 18, 2012. 121 adult members of the congregation and 24 of our youth ages 14-18 participated in at least one conversation. The groups ran an average of 90 minutes and were led by two members of the Team, who documented all feedback during the conversations. These notes were faithfully transcribed, sorted by category and theme, and summarized into the report below.

The Team wants to thank all group participants for their thoughtful responses.
Visioning Team Members: Cheryl Bachellor, Marsha Cordio, Kate Gilligan, John Lennhoff, Karen Letourneau, Allan Shapiro, Alison Sparks, Denise Vanvooren

Each group was asked to respond to the following four questions:

- 1. What distinguishes us from other faith communities?***
- 2. How do we cultivate a vibrant church?***
- 3. How do we foster connections within the community?***
- 4. What is the best use of our time talent and treasures, with both limited and unlimited resources?***

This is what we learned:

- We care deeply about the community we find at North Parish and want to share it with others.
- We are proud that we have an intentional focus on children and youth, are proud of our RE program, and want to develop opportunities in all areas for more multigenerational activities.
- We aspire to grow in our individual spiritual journeys and support opportunities for ongoing learning at all ages.
- We feel grateful for our dedicated, supportive and talented staff and would like to provide support for existing and expanding needs.
- We value our history and tradition, and are pleased that we are always exploring and are willing to develop, grow and change.
- We are grateful that we are an open, accepting and safe church and that there is a lack of dogma, and appreciate exposure to a variety of spiritual resources and ideas.

- We enjoy that Sunday services have enough ritual to provide familiarity and each service is different and interesting.
 - We value our connections among our members and want to foster connections to the larger community, the UUA and the world.
 - We are proud of our unique, free thinking philosophy and want to promote this and draw others to our beloved community.
 - We want to increase the diversity of our congregation and also want to forge relationships with other faiths, cultures and social groups.
 - We are proud of our history of social action and social justice and want to expand our outreach, provide more hands-on service activities and make it easier to get involved.
 - We recognize the need to use technology more for marketing, communication, outreach and volunteer activities while we continue to foster the personal connections of outreach, conversations, and gatherings.
 - We treasure our music program and would like to share our gifts with the broader community.
 - We respect that everyone is at different stages in their lives with varying amounts of time, energy and resources as well as differing interests, and want to help everyone find the most fulfilling and positive way for them to be involved.
 - We recognize the importance of building in ways to sustain our committees and finances and to provide ways to become involved over a wide range of interest and commitment levels.
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DETAILED FINDINGS AND THEMES

We noted these three broad themes emerging from the feedback:

CONNECTION • GROWTH • SERVICE

- I. The desire to facilitate and encourage **connection**, both within our congregation and with the greater community at large, is central to a great deal of the feedback we received.
- II. The second organizing theme is of **growth** – both internal and external. It's important to provide an accepting theological environment in which we can enhance and grow our spiritual practices. Participants also note the desire to diversify our membership and widen our exposure and reach out to other religious traditions.
- III. And participants consistently expressed the importance of not only **servicing** our church, but also providing support to the greater community as part of individual spiritual practices.

The following paragraphs will explore in more detail how these themes emerged in the process of asking the above four questions.

Question 1. *What distinguishes us from other faith communities?*

Group participants express that North Parish provides an accepting environment for people with diverse religious perspectives. This allows people to explore, question and grow their spiritual practice in a safe, connected community. The congregation is viewed as a welcoming community and a place to connect and build theology with others. The vision of this spiritual community provides interpersonal connectedness, and expands to include interconnectedness with the world around us. One group member describes the church as a “wheel with a source energy that radiates into the world”, whose purpose is to service others.

Question 2. *How to cultivate a vibrant church?*

Group participants express many diverse ideas on how to maintain North Parish as a vibrant church. The youth are consistently viewed as a key to future vibrancy. Offering religious education to children and youth that provides diversity of thought and the opportunity to connect with peers in an accepting social setting is viewed as an important ingredient to the future of North Parish. A desire for more intergenerational activities, thus increasing the connectedness between generations, arises often. Several members feel that social service activities that include youth would be a way to accomplish this. A strong religious education program is also thought to be a way of growing membership by attracting and maintaining young families to the community.

Members also express that as we “leave the building” in our programming we will foster a sense of community responsibility and increase member participation. Viewing volunteerism as a “joyful” practice was recommended by one member. Reaching out to more diverse cultural, ethnic, and spiritual communities is consistently suggested as a way of enriching our congregation.

Participants share many specific ideas about how to grow our congregation, increase connectedness and increase social outreach, including:

- Expanded adult spirituality classes
- Continuing quality worship services
- Maintain our strong music program
- Reach out to groups at different stages of life s (young parents, empty nesters, seniors etc.)
- Broaden use of technology to foster communication (website development, Skype services, social media etc.)
- Increase connection with other UU churches and the UUA
- Build and deepen relationships through the increased use of small groups
- Increase involvement in social justice issues.

Question 3. *How do we foster connections with the community?*

Some members feel that connecting with other faith and cultural traditions is a powerful way to foster connections in the community. One member recommended that “we reach out of our comfort zone” with listening and understanding as an approach to increase connectedness. Visits to other faith communities can strengthen our inter-faith connections.

Nonreligious programming is another approach to increasing our presence in the community. Co-sponsoring recreational and social action activities with outside groups is also suggested, including such ideas as: drum group for spiritual practice, activities for children, speakers on different topics, health education series, musical programs etc. Such activities would both increase our connectedness to the community and help us grow as a congregation.

Building individual connections with our congregational community is also viewed as important. Mentoring new members, providing support for individual spiritual journeys, exploring ways to address turnover in the membership, and increasing social opportunities for members to interact are all seen as helpful in fostering community.

Question 4. *What is the best use of our time, talents and treasure?*

Responses fell under the following categories:

In the light of Limited Resources:

1. Improve participation
2. Structure volunteer activities to be task vs. committee oriented
3. Increase out-reach within and outside of North Parish
4. Keep a strong music program
5. Maintain religious education as a priority
6. Increase intergenerational connections
7. Provide a variety of social opportunities for members
8. Improve effectiveness of communication and use of technology
9. Invest in succession planning for leadership
10. Increase social action
11. Provide expanded adult spirituality classes
12. Decrease carbon foot print

With the bounty of Unlimited Resources:

1. Leadership training/continuity
2. Increase staff
3. Expand / improve our space (including more extensive parking)
4. Increased technical support
5. Increased diversity
6. Long term financial stability
7. Board of Health Certified kitchen
8. Money to pay outside speakers

The themes running through the feedback received from participants in the process are the desire to grow individually and collectively, to build stronger connections with each other and the larger community, and to include service as part of our spiritual practice.