

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK  
WHITE STONE, VIRGINIA

**Imagining Our Future and Making it a Reality**  
**Presented on December 9, 2012 by the Board of Stewards**

**Introduction: Bob Weekley**

I feel so fortunate that we have a UU Fellowship here. When Elaine and I moved here from Arlington, that was one thing I was concerned about missing. But, lo and behold, I noticed an item in the Rappahannock Record one day that a group was meeting in White Stone. "The rest is history, as they say."

Last Sunday as I listened to our panel, I was reminded again why I value this group so highly -- I gain so much personal enrichment. And the many other activities that bring us together in addition to the Sunday services -- Phood & Philosophy, annual retreats, Circle of Life, Socrates Café, Movie Night, ... even the contact we have working together on our grounds, enriches our lives.

So today, in view of what has been accomplished so far, we take measure of our future. How do we retain our vitality as a Fellowship. What BRINGS us together? What KEEPS us together? How will we grow?

When we talk about growth, we are talking about something deeper than growth in numbers. I think of growth as a tree. Seedling trees spring up rapidly in my yard, growing very fast at first. But they are fragile and only a few mature to become robust, productive trees. In a fellowship like ours, we seek the growth that means we are a healthy, stable congregation, deeply rooted, robust, and fulfilling our mission in our community.

Last year our Vision and Planning Committee conducted a months-long discussion among members of the congregation seeking their hopes and dreams of what UUFR's future should be. Everyone had an opportunity to help develop a collective vision for the Fellowship -- *Where do you think we should go from here?* An online forum was conducted and supplemented by personal interviews to accumulate ideas. This was followed in November 2011 by an all-day session -- the Common Ground Workshop. Cliff Schelling and David Rowden who organized and led the workshop produced a list of the top initiatives. Next, the Board of Stewards took those initiatives to the Leadership Retreat in May and immersed themselves in *Imagining Our Future*.

The Leadership Retreat, after two days of immersion in *Imagining Our Future*, produced a new UUFR Five-Year Plan, 2013 -- 2018, and a longer range "Vision 2022," a proposed vision that could guide us in our actions as we move forward. (These are provided below.) I provided a report on these efforts in the July 2012 *Chalice*, and Marge Rowden gave a summary report at our Sunday service.

What were the initiatives proposed by the congregation and studied by the board? Some were short range and are already being implemented. Others are longer range and will require more study and elaboration by our members as we move forward. The Five-Year Plan, encapsulating the words of the congregational vision, states:

- Establish a path toward ministerial and administrative support
- Add building space to accommodate fellowship programs and growth
- Determine and implement our community service/social justice niche

Today, members of the board will address those three initiatives. First, Rev. Kathy Duhon will share her perspective on ministerial service in a small congregation. After that I will talk about building expansion, and then Tom Kinney will talk about the status of finding our community service/social justice niche.

### **Unitarian Universalist Ministry Presentation: Rev. Kathy Duhon**

What does Unitarian Universalist ministry look like? First, we believe ministry belongs to all of us, that we all do the ministry of the congregation. There is no two-tier system; nothing is reserved for only the clergy. A Unitarian Universalist can do anything a minister does, depending only on what a congregation decides, and within the bounds of state law. We believe that we all share our wisdom and service. That said, we have a professional and credentialed clergy, who have the most difficult preparation and the highest standards to meet.

We have a called ministry, which is a term from our past that may not be clear. We never hired clergy to work for a congregation; we called ministers to serve. This used to mean serving God in the setting of a particular congregation, and it can still mean that, for some UU ministers and congregations, but we also may understand the call to mean to serve the world, the interdependent web of all existence, the larger community, Love, etc. When you call a minister, you are not bringing in someone to take care of your needs, but inviting someone to share a larger service with you, and you are thereby giving a gift to the wider community.

We are a free church, which means that no one assigns a minister; you choose your minister based on your situation and particular needs and hopes and dreams. A congregation spends some time deciding who they are and what ministry they want before they go into the process of search. The UUA and the district may help a little as a dating service, but less so in these days of 'internet hook ups'. After a big process, you call the minister and make a covenant together, sacred pledges that you both make to each other about what you expect and how you will act toward each other. A Unitarian Universalist minister always has a free pulpit, and will say whatever is in their heart and on their mind. A congregation can always decide that a ministry has failed and void their covenant.

Besides this standard way of calling a parish minister, we have other forms of ministry. For many years, there have been interims, ministers who come for a year or two of transition, who are specially trained to help with transitions, and are never intended to stay. More recently, the short-term and flexible version of consulting or contract ministry has become popular, especially with smaller congregations and part-time ministry. This process is simpler and involves less of a commitment on either side, but can be renewed and even turned into a long term called ministry.

What does a minister do? They provide pastoral care, which for me, in a congregation about this size, happened weekly. Not always in my office, or my home, but sometimes in the grocery store line or on vacation, with people in my congregation and in the larger community. People look to ministers to tell their matters of heart, to explore their questions of faith, to help in a crisis time, and ministers are present.

In the wider community a minister is the ultimate contact person for a congregation, the "face" who makes it real – people out there may wonder what a fellowship is, but they know who a reverend is. Ministers serve in the community on non-profit boards, in interfaith groups, do community organizing, and become a conduit with the UUA and the district. Ministers write newspaper columns, lead interfaith services, visit at nursing homes and hospitals, officiate

weddings and funerals in the deepest heart-centered way, and become the go-to person for local reporters when something important happens in a community. Ministers can set a tone, and UU ministers keep that tone open and compassionate.

Worship services are the public center of a congregation and a minister brings a high degree of training and expertise to make that experience great. A UU minister, even a full time one, never leads every service – at least once a month the time is reserved for others, and more often when the minister is part-time. A minister can help plan, monitor, and review the programs with a committee, and can serve as a consultant for individuals who are leading a service.

Religious Education is almost always part of the minister’s work and they usually lead a class 2 or 3 times a year. Ministers can help other teachers find the material or the training. They promote children’s religious education.

A Unitarian Universalist minister grows a congregation, in numbers and in depth, and helps build the larger community.

### **Community Service/Social Justice “Niche”: Tom Kinney**

The Community Service/Social Justice “niche” program is making careful but steady progress toward a decision by the Fellowship regarding the “if and what” of launching a program to make a permanent change for the better in our community. All but a small handful of members voted their preference on the last go round. Breaking the family cycle of poverty was the nearly unanimous target. Two points of intervention are favored; (1) the problem of poor socialization and preparation for learning among the very young indicating a greater need for successful pre-school-like programs and (2) actively addressing poor nutrition and hunger which negatively impacts development through the first 1000 days of a child’s life and beyond.

The next step for the Social Justice / Community Service group is to get a better understanding of the root cause of these two problems. To understand the root cause, research is needed to learn why some area Head Start programs and Title I programs are not reaching those who need them the most and gathering feedback on how successful they have been with those they have been able to reach. The root cause could be lack of transportation among the underserved, lack of priorities, cultural issues, teacher motivation / training, or a number of other possibilities. On the nutrition and hunger side, is the problem lack of understanding the importance of nutrition? Or access to high nutrition foods? Or is the problem wholly economic? Or could it be that in the mix of family priorities, children’s nutrition and hunger lose out?

Understanding the problem by the study group will lead to sharing that knowledge with the membership along with an action plan to make a permanent difference in our community. The Fellowship will make the final decision on the path forward.

### **Building Expansion: Bob Weekley**

When UUFRC was meeting in rented space on Sunday mornings at the White Stone Woman’s Club, some members began to dream of a place that would be – as they came to envision it – “A Home of Our Own.”

At first only a few were motivated by the idea. But as we continued to develop the concept, and to envision how it would help us grow in many healthy ways, the campaign took off. In time the congregation voted that the sacrifices we would all make – funds and volunteer work – would reap rewards. UUFR would become a real place on the map, a permanent landmark in the community, a place for us to hold both UUFR and community events whenever we would choose, a place for us to gather for times of both joy and grieving. Our grounds could become a place for beauty and meditation, for commemorating dear, deceased, members, and for expanding our facilities as needed.

We proceeded step-by-step. Members joined numerous committees to consider all facets of the construction effort. Members turned out to help with the work – clearing the land, building walls, painting, and planting. Our obvious enthusiasm for self-help was matched by the national and district UU organizations that provided substantial funding.

Now our members, having peered into the future, have seen the need for the additional building space that will keep us on the path of healthy growth. The November, 2011, Common Ground Workshop, asked us to look into future needs for space. We formed an Architectural Concept Team that looked at our needs, both now and in the future. The Concept Team considered two aspects of building needs –

- Increased sanctuary space for Sunday Services and other special events like memorial services and weddings.
- Multiuse space for other activities: meetings, after-service fellowship, receptions and fellowship dinners, adult and children’s classes, yoga and other exercise classes, community rentals, all activities that help make possible a more diverse community space. Perhaps we would refer to it as a “Fellowship Hall” such as so many churches find essential to their wider mission.

Regarding increased sanctuary space, the Architectural Concept Team examined the membership threshold that should trigger a serious sanctuary expansion project. The team’s demographic growth projections indicated that we are not at that membership threshold and we can continue to monitor our needs in that regard.

Regarding a multiuse space, a “Fellowship Hall,” the team recommended that we commence an effort by recruiting a building committee to develop conceptual designs of such a space for consideration by the congregation and then confirm congregational support. Based on congregational support the Fellowship would move forward to design and build such a multiuse space. Our new Five-Year Plan sets forth a series of progress benchmarks for moving down this road.

I also should mention land acquisition. Envisioning the longer-term future of UUFR, we must keep the options open for ever increasing needs as the community and the Fellowship expand. We have been alert to the acquisition of adjoining blocks of land that could be used for additional church and community purposes, or that would serve at least as a buffer from distracting development that could occur. A friend of UUFR already has acquired one such property and donated it to the Fellowship. We did attempt a bid on another adjoining piece but so far we have been unsuccessful in its acquisition. We need to remain watchful for future opportunities for land acquisition.

## **What Can YOU Do?**

We have come so far because of members and friends who believed in the need for establishing a permanent home for Unitarian Universalism in this region. I am convinced that there are people around here that don't know who and what we are, and once they find out will want to become a part of us. Some will come with children. They are our future and we need to prepare for them.

There is another fact of life that I am more solemn about. Every organization has a "founding generation." Inevitably that founding generation, the generation that worked and sacrificed to build the organization, passes out of the picture. For many organizations this transition becomes the fork in the road – one path leading on to greater growth and mission accomplishment or and the other path leading down to deterioration. To maintain the Fellowship's vitality, a succeeding generation needs to be already picking up the mantle and preparing to lead into the future.

Members of our congregation who have found a spiritual home here need to band together with others to plan and implement the future needs of our home. This is not just a job for the officers you have elected. We all need to bring our ideas forward, to join with others on teams and committees, to think about what each person or family can contribute to building a healthy future for the UUFR.

Regarding ministerial support, we have examples of congregations of about our size that were able to hire a part-time minister with the result that the congregation moved forward by unexpected leaps and bounds.

Regarding building space, we have seen similar congregations provide a welcoming space for kids and families and they found that space soon filled. Already members of our own congregation have quietly voted with their checkbooks and started putting funds into a building fund for a multiuse building or whatever the congregation decides. Over \$20,000 has been donated so far.

Regarding our community service/social justice niche, as we play an ever more vital role in our community we will be infused with the joy of making a difference and fulfilling our mission.

May we all join together in bringing about this future that you have envisioned for keeping this spiritual lighthouse shining on the shores of the Virginia's Rappahannock River!

Attachments: Five-Year Plan 2013-2018  
Vision 2022

## **UUFR Five-year Plan 2013-2018**

***The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock is to put Unitarian Universalist Principles into practice through programs that empower spiritual exploration, critical thinking, social service, and provide a spiritual home for future generations.***

The UUFR Board of Stewards proposes the following Five-year Plan to meet the expressed goals and needs of our members and friends:

### Empower spiritual exploration and critical thinking

- ❖ Continue and strengthen Sunday services that provide depth in religion, spirituality, intellectual growth, and critical thinking.
- ❖ Encourage and support expansion of covenant groups, discussion groups, Phood and Philosophy, music programs, including our celebrations and traditions.
- ❖ Build a Religious Education program for children.
  - Childcare, elementary group, Coming of Age group. (See Progress Benchmarks.)
- ❖ Establish a regularly scheduled adult RE program.

### Social service and connection to community

- ❖ Determine and implement our UUFR community service/social justice niche. (See Progress Benchmarks.)
- ❖ Continue responding to opportunities to serve our community.
- ❖ Connect and cooperate with the churches in our neighborhood and the greater community.
- ❖ Provide intellectual, cultural, and artistic programs open to the public.
- ❖ Sensitize members to issues of social justice in our community and nation.

### Provide a spiritual home for future generations

- ❖ Establish a path toward ministerial and administrative support. Determine a threshold that initiates action toward part-time ministry. Define what administrative support is needed. (See Progress Benchmarks.)
- ❖ Add building space to accommodate growth (children's programs, other fellowship programs). (See Progress Benchmarks.)

### Health and Vitality of the Fellowship

- ❖ Strengthen our visitor welcoming and follow-up program.
- ❖ Reinforce member support system for those absent and/or ill.

# UUFR Five-year Plan 2013-2018

## Progress Benchmarks

- Build a Religious Education Program for children
  - ✓ Current facility has been converted to look like UU for Kids program is wanted
  - ✓ Children's involvement in Sunday morning services has increased
  - ✓ Volunteer teacher commitments have been confirmed
  - ✓ Every UUFR parent has been contacted concerning ideas and participation commitment
  - ✓ A reliable Sunday morning UU for Kids program is in place
  - ✓ Youth social events, game nights, field trips, etc. have been added
  - ✓ Community youth connections through the nature trail, social justice, life skills /decisions seminars, and hosting existing youth groups/clubs are happening
  
- Determine and implement our UUFR community service/social justice niche
  - ✓ Phase I Research on possible niches is completed
  - ✓ Congregation has selected the top three
  - ✓ Leadership team identified
  - ✓ Phase II thorough research of selected three completed
  - ✓ Congregation has selected niche
  - ✓ Root cause research completed and reported
  - ✓ Action plan completed and funds committed
  - ✓ Final congregational commitment confirmed and implement begun
  
- Establish a path toward ministerial and administrative support.
  - ✓ Ministerial and administrative duties desired are defined
  - ✓ Congregation's perspective and input has been obtained
  - ✓ Various resources on approach, process, opportunities, and concerns consulted
  - ✓ Threshold conditions that prompt further action determined and supported
  - ✓ Financial plan making sufficient funds available at threshold point is happening
  
- Add RE multi-use building space to accommodate growth of programs
  - ✓ Building Committee identified
  - ✓ Conceptual design for RE addition in cooperation with congregation developed
  - ✓ Costs including endowment increase for added maintenance support estimated
  - ✓ Financial commitments confirming no less than estimated costs are finalized
  - ✓ Construction Drawings Completed
  - ✓ Yes/no on hiring a general contractor and yes/no volunteer labor decided
  - ✓ Costs determined and budget established
  - ✓ Congregation vote of approval to construct building acquired
  - ✓ Construction schedule consistent with cash flow finalized
  - ✓ Construction contracts signed and construction begun
  - ✓ Supervision /coordination of construction, volunteers, and cash flow systems in place
  - ✓ Sunday attendance vs. action threshold concerning sanctuary space monitoring is ongoing

# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK

## **VISION 2022 -- May 8, 2012**

*Following is the proposed collective vision of UUFR in 2022 created by the Board of Stewards to be reviewed, modified, and supported by the congregation providing a guide to actions that will make this vision real.*

General: How we “do church” today and our related member-focused and other day-to-day activities are widely supported with little if any dissatisfaction as determined by the Vision and Planning program for 2011. Thus, in 2022, our day-to-day activities will have benefitted from the continuing the process of improvements, enhancements, and adjustments in response to the opportunities that unfold and the expressed desires of the congregation. Five areas need special mention for all to be able to visualize UUFR in 2022. Of course, as we proceed toward that vision we will learn, revise where needed, and maintain the vitality that has brought us this far.

- 1) UU for Kids 2022: We have made progress in spite of the demographics in our UU for Kids programs such that we have 2-3 classes each Sunday during the church service. Our Sunday school attendance varies from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 15 and is organized by pre-school, elementary, and older children—the latter two groups occasionally combine in a “one-room schoolhouse” mode with the older ones assisting / teaching the younger ones. Our teachers are our members, some being parents, and serving on a rotating basis supplemented by paid teachers as required. Our facilities have been expanded to accommodate this three-classroom program with emphasis upon flexibility of use for a variety of purposes. The additional space is highly utilitarian and aesthetically complimentary to the existing building.
- 2) Community Service / Social Justice Niche—UUFR’s Primary Faith In Action Program: By 2022, our niche has not only been determined but we are beginning to realize our first successes and are considering expanding our reach. We have leveraged our resources by drawing on other organizations, businesses, and governmental units such that UUFR is the “go to” organization leading this action to make a lasting difference for the better in our community. Our congregation selected this niche 7-8 years previously based upon the committee presentations of a number of options. For this collective visioning activity in 2012, we do not yet know what option will be selected. However, to add to the mental picture of the 2022, let us imagine the niche is to break the cycle of poverty through working with the youngest of children and their parents. In that example, in 2022 we would have a facility successfully operating in a nearby poverty pocket and be considering establishing a second center in another pocket of poverty. The children entering the program in 2014 have grown to the point that 1-on-1 mentoring is now becoming a reality. A substantial portion of the congregation having supported the niche selection, our members are now participating on a rotational basis to avoid burnout. Some individuals have been hired from the niche funds to increase our capabilities.

- 3) Sunday Morning Gathering Space: We have completed our current sanctuary area with improved acoustics, more flexible lighting, and other enhancements to make our Sunday morning services and other uses more comfortable and effective. We have completed our 16' x 32' Gathering Deck with awning to add to our after-service socializing space among the deck's many other uses. There has been some consideration for expansion of the foyer but a second look at our growth rate is in process to see if we have crossed the growth threshold triggering a more serious study of a possible addition to the sanctuary or even a new, larger sanctuary freeing the existing sanctuary for use as an all-purpose room. On growth, we have realized our UU faith can only take us so far in drawing new members from the community and found that what we are doing in and for the community is drawing new members beyond our UU faith.
- 4) Paid Staff: A bold track has led us to a half-time minister focused upon pastoral care, connection to the greater community, and with a passion for our Community Service / Social Justice niche work. This minister is not primarily a preaching minister thus is assigned usually one and occasionally two sermons per month as we continue to cherish our lay-led and guest speaker format. The expenses of the minister are paid in large part by an endowment that was funded prior to employment and dedicated specifically for that purpose. This continuation of our high level of fiscal responsibility will continue to minimize the possibility of having a half-time minister from becoming a financial burden or source of stress within the Fellowship.
- 5) Utilization of Resources—Human and Facility: The hours our members devote to the Fellowship are a healthy mix of our in-house activities, our Faith in Action programs, and the care of our grounds and building. The talents, capabilities, and desires of our members have been assessed and applied to the greatest advantage to the individual and the Fellowship. Our facility is actively used between Sundays rented for highly compatible activities such as yoga classes as well as all the UUFR programs underway. In addition the facility is used for non-UUFR community charitable programs, some that rotate their monthly meeting site among many area churches wherein community leaders become familiar with our facilities and programs.