

# **Vision, Mission, and Covenant: Creating a Future Together**



**New Congregation and Growth Resources  
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**Important note for searching UUA.org:** All UUA resources mentioned are available in the Leaders section of the web site, in the Leaders’ Library. Please use quotes around the title when you search to bring up the resource or item you seek.

## Foreword

Who are we, as individual Unitarian Universalist congregations? Who are you, within your own community when you gather on Sunday morning or Saturday afternoon, or Wednesday night, or any of the other times that you gather? Who are you, as a religious community?

These are the questions that a vision, mission, and covenant process will help you ask, answer, and articulate in a positive way. As the biblical prophet said it, “Without a vision, then the people will perish.” It is also true that if you don’t know where you’re going, then any road will take you there. Without knowing why we bother to gather, to meet, and to be a community, Unitarian Universalist congregations are in danger of ceasing to exist, or of merely replicating the local university’s continuing education program, or the local debating society, or the local country club. If we don’t know who we are as individual Unitarian Universalist congregations, then what is there to differentiate us, one from the other and from all the myriad choices that people have in deciding how to spend their time, their energy, and their money? In communities that have multiple Unitarian Universalist congregations, what distinguishes one from another? Without vision, we stand in danger of withering on the vine. Countless people within our regions stand to lose valuable and viable religious communities that can sustain them in times of trouble and concern.

This document on vision, mission, and covenant assumes that not only are Unitarian Universalist congregations worth strengthening but also that the message of our religious movement is important to the world around us. We provide a saving message that people need and want to hear—one of equality of all people, of the need to strive for social justice, of the glory that there is nothing that we need to do to be deemed worthy. In fact, if we didn’t believe in the importance and possibility of this message for the world around our congregations, then there would be no need for mission, vision, and covenant statements. Rather, we could just continue to exist without paying attention to the deepest questions of why we gather and why we continue to be.

We also assume that every congregation can be strengthened or rejuvenated. This idea comes from the realization that although most of the congregations we participate in were originally called into being many years ago, the gathered and worshipping community is actually called into being every time two or more gather in its name. Each person who enters a religious community is not only touched by it; each individual also touches and transforms the congregation. It is true that we are more than just the people who gather, but it is also true that the people who do gather give each congregation its particular flavor, personality, and reason for being. It is the purpose of a vision, mission, and covenant process to help congregations (and the people in them) understand more deeply the reasons they gather, the reasons they exist in the world, and what they want to do in the world.

## Concise Definitions

It is always helpful to understand how language is used in a particular context. There are many competing definitions of the words vision, mission, and covenant. In this document, the terms mean the following:

**Vision:** A carefully defined picture of where the congregation wants to be in five or more years. It is the dream of what the congregation can become.

**Mission:** A concise statement of what the congregation wants to be known for, or known as, within the wider world; what the congregation wants to mean to the community.

**Covenant:** A statement of how members of the congregation will be with, and will behave toward, one another, as well as what is promised or vowed to one another and to the congregation as a whole.

Fuller definitions of these terms, along with provocative questions, can be found later in this document.

## The Historical Context

**Tip:** You may find this section helpful to the congregation's understanding of the place of covenant within our religious history.

From the earliest days of recorded history in the Western world, there are stories of vision, mission, and covenant as foundational parts of religious community. These stories have been told in song, dance, and language, and they are the story of community—individual stories woven into an intricate collective narrative that shows the identity of the community. Each story may be appreciated on its own but gains in power when seen in its larger context. An understanding of the significance of vision, mission, and covenant work today is increased by knowledge of the role of covenants in early New England congregational life, and of patterns of religious life in Europe before that. It is a story that involves risk, missions accomplished and failed, covenants made and broken.

The universal aspects of vision, mission, and covenant may be seen throughout Western religious culture. The story of the people of Israel is a record of God's covenant with a community. It is celebrated in various events: the saving of Noah, his family, and the animals during the Flood (Genesis 6–8); the covenant with Abraham when God gave Abraham the land of Canaan, and when God renewed the covenant after asking for Isaac's sacrifice (Genesis 17, 22); the delivery of the Ten Commandments to Moses (Exodus 19–20); and the deliverance of the people from Egyptian bondage at the Exodus (Exodus 11–14). After the fall of the temple and exile from the promised land, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant: "See, the days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel. . . . Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31).

The early Christian community saw itself as part of a continuing covenant, restored through the life and teachings of Jesus. The covenant that was rooted in the history of Israel was seen both as fulfilled by the life of Jesus and as the basis for the existence of the Christian mission. For Christians, Jesus was the one who came to save them and to provide them with life everlasting, thus fulfilling the earlier covenants. This created for them a new covenant and a new mission—God would save them, and it would be their responsibility to spread God's word to save others. Later theologians such as John Calvin and Augustine spoke of the Christian life as a "covenant of grace" and as the "saving acts" of God in history. Covenant as a way of being with one another was also made real in the work of Benedict when he formulated his "Rule for Monasteries." Created in the sixth century, this document spelled out all the details of how the monks should live together, and monasteries and other religious communities today still use it virtually as it was originally written.

The Enlightenment was a broad movement of scientific and naturalistic thought that often emphasized the human role in redemption, the importance of reason, and a view of human progress in history. Eighteenth-century thinkers such as Descartes, Voltaire, Pascal, Rousseau, and Hume sought to create general laws based on human experience and observation, experimentation, and mental deduction. They believed that if they could just uncover and understand these human laws, they could create systems of laws and codes of conduct that would enhance civilization and the ability of humankind to get along.

The strands of the biblical covenant and the work of the Enlightenment thinkers were combined in our North American immigrant ancestors. The early European immigrants based their new congregations not on specified creeds but on means of covenants reminiscent of those of the biblical days. The Cambridge Platform was created in 1648 specifically to settle differences and strengthen relationships among local congregations in New England. The platform held that “there is no greater Church than a Congregation” and that each congregation would be autonomous because of this fact. Yet at the same time, the platform also stated that there were duties and responsibilities that congregations owed to one another: care, consultation, admonition, participation, recommendation, and relief. For more discussion on this subject, refer to the document *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity*, by the Commission on Appraisal, 1995, section 2 at UUA.org by clicking Leaders then Leaders’ Library and searching ‘Congregational Polity.’

The organizing principle of such covenants was to make churches out of collections of individuals, to establish community. Coming from a European context where people were not always allowed religious freedom, congregation founders wanted to create a way of living that was different and respectful of others. This orientation was, in effect, a paradigm shift—a change from one way of being with each other to a different one, where the rules and regulations that governed interaction were substantially changed. Refer to the definition of paradigm in the glossary, page 68.

This shift in behavior and consciousness was done with reliance upon God, but also in light of reason and the value of human life as part of the underlying assumption. For example, the 1629 Salem Covenant used the following language:

We Covenant with the Lord and one with another, and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth.

Stepping outside of our tradition’s direct European roots, the universal aspects of covenant can also be found in Eastern traditions. For example, in the early period of the Buddhist community, the Buddha could have remained in his enlightened (or awakened) state and have had no further concern for the transient world. But out of

compassion for others, he decided to devote himself to proclaiming the dharma (the truth that he had discovered through his awakening). In so doing, he began to attract disciples who wished to be instructed in “the way” or “path” of which he spoke. The community of the Buddha, therefore, became organized around a commitment to the way of life and shared vision of how to overcome suffering. They created a shared assumption of how life was organized and of how they would interact with one another—ways that were based on the models that preceded them.

### **Why Undertake Vision, Mission, and Covenant Work?**

With its richness from the past, vision, mission, and covenant come to life today in the midst of people gathered in religious community. In fact, the genius—and the risk—of liberal religion is that each new generation must discover its own understanding of vision, mission, and covenant. There is some truth to the remark that “liberal religion is always only one generation removed from extinction,” because without the valuable work in discovering and creating vision, mission, and covenant, the reasons why our congregations gather can be lost. Because we choose to allow (and to insist upon) individual determination of belief, we cannot fall back onto historical statements as the reasons why we exist. Rather, the members of each gathered community must determine for themselves the reasons why they continue to exist.

Some congregations have historical covenant statements—statements recited or posted by their congregations from centuries past—but these historic covenants serve a different purpose than newly created and renewed statements. These historic statements bind today’s people to those who came before, reminding them that the congregation is never really theirs; instead, the congregation is “borrowed” for the time being from those who came before and from those who will follow in their footsteps. These historic covenants do not necessarily set out who and what the congregation is now or wants to be as it moves forward, but rather they capture the spirit of the congregation’s history.

This talk about each generation’s needing to create its own vision, mission, and covenant might be a bit misleading, for according to the experience and advice of congregational experts, these statements need to be revisited at least every five years. With people entering and exiting our congregations, the way to keep these documents alive and vital is to make sure the gathered people have ownership of them. This ownership is best created through inviting the people into the process rather than just telling them the results. Yet as stated before, if this process is to be vital and the work productive, it cannot just be done and put on a shelf; instead, the vision, mission, and covenant must be live documents used in the everyday life of the congregation.

In this way, vision, mission, and covenant are resources for congregational development and health. As alluded to in the Foreword, congregations without a compelling and shared vision may too easily lose track of what they should be doing and, consequently, struggle to determine how to allocate their human and financial resources. Without a centralizing agreed-upon focus, battles can rage over competing interests and equally good projects. However, when vision and mission are in place, all discussion circles back to these articulated statements for a double check and grounding. In congregational decision making, the “winning” decision should reflect the vision and mission of the congregation. If it doesn’t, then something needs to change. Sometimes it’s the decision that needs to change, and sometimes it is time to revisit the vision or revise the mission of the congregation. The vision and mission may incorporate the sentiments of historical covenants, but they are made alive by the involvement and participation of today’s members looking forward, as well as back, in time.

Studies have shown that the congregations that have living vision, mission, and covenant statements are the ones that are growing—not only in numbers but also in the depth of membership commitment. This growth shows in the depth of commitment members have to the world around them and to living more fulfilled lives. By terming these statements living, we mean that the process is followed through from vision to mission to objectives into the actualization of the congregation’s dreams. Too often, vision and mission work is done without the subsequent steps to make the results come alive, and they remain pretty words on paper. When this happens, resistance and resentment build up; people who helped craft the visions, missions, and covenants feel as if their time, thought, and emotion were not well spent.

When a congregation’s leadership follows through with the mission to create objectives, ties all major decisions back to these statements, and makes sure the statements are effectively used in worship, the commitment of the members is strengthened. Congregations with vital, living visions and missions are growing, whereas those without them have little substance to attract new people to their midst. Districts that have done this work have discovered deeper resources and ideas for helping congregations fulfill themselves. The process of vision, mission, and covenant is ongoing; its richness grows as it is applied. No one can promise you that vision, mission, and covenant work will answer all your problems and directions, but it will help you determine where you want to go, and which paths you need to take to get you there.

Some times the creation of vision, mission, and covenant statements reflects a shift in paradigm—a change in the way things are done and in the way in which people interact with one another. Sometimes the creation causes such a shift. (Refer to the “Understanding the Change Process,” page 22.) Such a shift in people’s understanding of who they are can create tension; yet by being aware of this

tension, speaking about it forthrightly, and engaging the members and friends of the congregation in the shift through a widespread process of development, this tension can help bring into place creative and deeper relationships among people of the congregation. Vision, mission, and covenant work is not easy. Developing and following a good process that involves most of the people in the congregation is hard work and takes time. And the outcome can be well worth it.

## What Are Vision, Mission, and Covenant?

The words vision, mission, and covenant often seem to have divergent meanings, changing not only between fields of application but sometimes even within the same field. They are also interrelated; vision has the broadest focus, which then narrows into mission and covenant, becoming further focused as these statements come alive through shared ministry goals and mission objectives. The diagram below sets out a conceptual picture of how they fit together. Because of the confusion of terminology that often occurs, it is necessary to clearly define the terms and use them consistently within congregational life.



## What Is Vision?

A vision is a carefully defined picture of the congregation's future. It is not the current reality of the congregation, but it is a dream of what the congregation wants to make of itself. The vision answers the following question:

- What do we want the congregation to look like in five or ten years as a result of its efforts in ministry, programming, and outreach?

The vision needs to be empowering and to be more than a cherished possession of just a few. It needs to be a shared vision, created among and by the people who are in the congregation. A shared vision enables a congregation to move from the status quo toward a new reality. A shared vision can create new ways of thinking and acting, and it should be broad enough to provide growing room for the congregation. A shared vision needs to be renewed continually as a congregation grows and accepts new challenges. Although it may be tempting to limit the vision to what we conceive as possible or to what we know the congregation is currently doing, the vision must be bigger than this if it is to be inspiring and empowering. A vision requires of us the ability to take a long-term view of ourselves as a congregation. It also must be specific and concrete so that it can be known and worked toward.

The vision statement binds together the individual thoughts and desires of the people. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization*, writes: "When a group of people come to share a vision for an organization [a congregation], each person sees their own picture of the organization at its best. Each shares responsibility for the whole, not just for their piece." Vision is what takes us beyond where we stand in the congregation and helps us both understand and take responsibility for how the dimensions and activities of a congregation fit into the larger, overarching aim for the future of the congregation.

Yet the vision is not a creed, nor is it a substitute for individual or collective theological reflection. It speaks of the institution and what it wants to be. For example, the vision of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) is to become an antiracist, antioppression, multicultural institution. This vision is a clear and concise statement, and although it is built upon the UUA's shared understanding of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, this vision statement is not a theological statement. It may well be that theological work by individuals alone and in concert within the congregation is a good beginning for work on a vision, but the two should not be confused.

Similarly, the vision is not the words that you find in the legal papers of the organization. That language is often constricted by the legal process and usually is a general statement of the purposes of the congregation. The language is rarely changed and exists primarily out of legal necessity. (If the legal definition is vastly different from the vision of the congregation, however, legal counsel should be consulted to see what, if any, implications arise out of the difference.)

## **What Is Mission?**

The mission is a carefully defined, concise, and focused statement of what the congregation wants to mean to the community, and for what it wishes to be known. It is a statement of who you are and what you value, and it should be the measuring stick for all the congregation does. The mission statement should incorporate answers to the following questions:

- If this is our vision, where does this lead us in mission?
- What “must” we do?
- In what ways does our vision lead us in service toward others in the broader community?

Every congregation has a mission—a way it lives out its life—but too often the mission is hidden in the fabric of the congregation and the “way we do things here.” Healthy congregations consciously articulate their mission, and this mission paints a path of how to move from the present reality to the dreamed-of vision. The mission should use active, not passive, verbs and should be the guide for congregational life.

The mission should relate a congregation to the community context by establishing the congregation’s sense of religious identity, relating this identity to the needs of those the congregation aims to serve. The mission should answer the question of who is to be served, what service is for those inside the congregation, and what service is offered to those in the wider community. To be effective, the mission must be owned by the congregation’s membership, committees, and staff.

There is a difference between a mission and a mission statement. Until the mission is made real through the development of goals and objectives, it is merely a statement, a piece of paper. To be a mission fully lived, it requires specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound goals and objectives.

## **What Is Covenant?**

Covenants describe the way people interact with one another. They incorporate the values, prized beliefs, and behaviors that are held dear, and they set out an image of how individuals are expected to behave in groups.

The formation of a covenant is a process that helps form and maintain the internal identity of a congregation. The promises and commitments people make to one another in the context of a religious community help them understand what their tradition calls them to be. The covenant grows from an affirmation of shared needs, values, purposes, and principles. It is rooted in the past and reflects the promises that people make into the future. Covenants should answer the following question:

- What are the qualities we want in our life and work together?

Historically, covenants were three-way documents between two or more individuals or groups and that which they considered most holy. An example is marriage vows made within religious communities, where the couple makes their vows within the sight and hearing of God, thereby increasing the sanctity of their commitment. Within our Unitarian Universalist congregations, it is often the community that is the most holy, and thereby covenant statements are made between the individuals in the community. The presence of the third party (whether the holy, the congregation, the future, all that one holds high, or some other collectively agreed-upon other) helps remind people of a sense of accountability to someone or something larger. It helps remind us that we are not alone, and that in all we do we should pay attention to the legacy we leave behind. Covenants help remind people of who they said they want to be in their interactions with the world around them.

Many congregations have created behavioral covenants as a way to protect children or respond to a particularly difficult time in the congregation's history. Although these covenants are valuable and often necessary, the creation of a broad, overarching covenant during a period without strife can lay the groundwork for dealing with the difficult times that arise in congregational life.

Please refer to the Unitarian Universalist Association's "Safe Congregations Resources," at [UUA.org](http://UUA.org) by going to the Leaders' Library and by searching "Safe Congregations."\* Also useful for this work is Gilbert R. Rendle's Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences (see the Resources List).

### **Commonalities: Vision, Mission, and Covenant**

Although vision, mission, and covenant are parts of a whole and serve separate aims, they are still interrelated. The mission grows directly out of the vision, and the vision is built upon the shared values, concerns, and principles that are articulated in the covenant. All three of them call the congregation to be aware of itself as a corporate citizen and to honor the individuals within it. They also have other common aspects.

### **Dynamics**

The vision, mission, and covenant statements all include the following dynamics:

- **Relational.** The statements involve commitments between people, as well as between people and a shared vision.
- **Paradoxical.** The statements involve living within a balance between what might appear to be contradictory values, such as individual freedom and community values, reason and faith, past and present, and being and becoming.

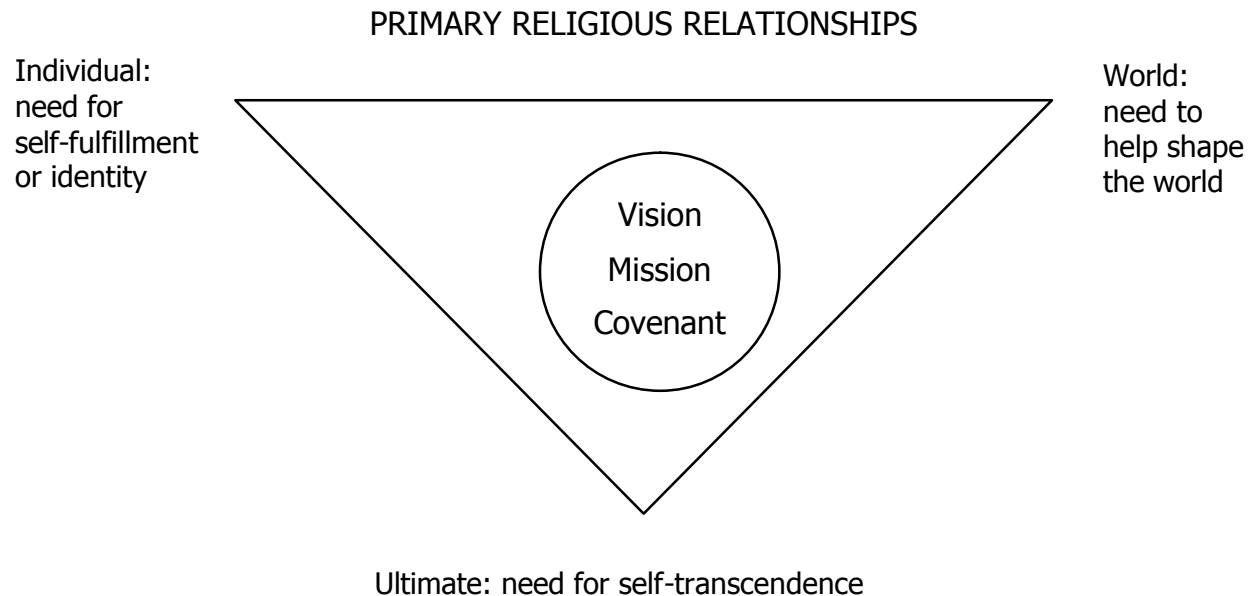
- **Democratic.** All the statements are based on the free association of persons, and they are open to new insights as the people involved change over time.
- **Historical.** The statements are rooted in what the congregation has been, because they reflect the dreams and values in a particular place and time.
- **Convictional.** Vision, mission, and covenant statements affirm shared needs, values, purposes, and principles. They say, in effect, “For now, this is what we hold as most valuable.”
- **Contextual.** Although part of a larger movement, these statements come out of a particular congregation in a particular location in a particular time with a particular history of who they have been, as well as particular possibilities of who they can become.
- **Dynamic.** The process of developing vision, mission, and covenant takes place over time as people reflect upon and renew their promises, and as congregations grow and change.
- **Visionary.** These statements show the world not as it is but as it could be. They embody the best dreams and desires of people striving to be their best and to create a world that is more fair.

### Primary Religious Questions

Vision, mission, and covenant are also related in that they are, in effect, the center of a triangle of religious questions. As human beings, we ask questions in three specific arenas:

- **Who am I?** Theologian Alfred North Whitehead said that “religion is what one does with one’s solitude.” Our primary religious need is for individual fulfillment and identity—for understanding who we are beyond our roles and the expectations of others.
- **Who am I in relationship to the world?** Because we are not isolated beings, we wonder how to be in relation to others, how to live ethically, and how to shape the world around us to reflect the way we think things should be.
- **What is of ultimate importance to me?** It used to be that there was a simple answer to this question: God. But in these days when we cannot assume that everyone believes in God, or that God is the same for every believer, this question takes on an even greater significance. Not only are we faced with defining that which we believe is most ultimate; we also seek an authentic relationship to that ultimate.

Vision, mission, and covenant find themselves sandwiched between these three distinct points: individual, world, and ultimate. The following diagram shows one way of visualizing the dynamic tension between these distinct points.



### **Tension between Individual and Community**

One of the shared and more challenging aspects of developing vision, mission, and covenant processes and statements within congregations is the tension between the individual and the community. Vision, mission, and covenant describe how identity is formed within the religious community, but not just that of individuals. Just as identity formation is crucial in human development, so too is it crucial in corporate religious life. Without clarity of identity and mission, organizations lose sight of who they are and where they are going.

When considering identity, though, most of us think only in terms of individuals, not institutions. We concentrate on the private dimensions of identity (self-awareness and personal growth) rather than on the public dimensions (group awareness and community development) or on the way in which the community creates the individual (mentoring, shaping, and reflection of self). Our thinking has been shaped by a pull toward the individual and toward being private, rather than by a sense that even as individuals we are embedded within communities of people we know and people we don't know.

The search for personal identity is important, but it is certainly not the only search. Society could not survive if people were driven only by the need to maximize self-interest. Human beings also seek relatedness and identity that roots us within

community. Indeed, personal identity and community identity should not be seen from an either/or position, as they are intimately interrelated. Personal development depends upon relationships formed and nurtured in community, and healthy community rests upon healthy, fully functioning individuals.

Yet the movement from personal to community identity in a religious context may be one of the most critical concerns facing Unitarian Universalists. How do we speak about a corporate religious identity while we believe in individual freedom of belief and while our style of life encourages such diversity? The most obvious and deceptively simple response is that we simply must begin, if we believe ourselves to be a religious community and not merely a collection of individuals. Identity must be seen in a cultural context, in the paradigm that creates it and is created by it. It is often hard to see what has shaped the individual; the context in which we live and move and breathe is to us like water to fish—nearly invisible. The sense of the individual as private has become a distinct and dominant part of our culture, so it is sometimes difficult to remind ourselves of the communal context in which we live. Yet remembering this communal context is essential to building a healthy and vibrant religious community. No one gets what he or she wants all the time, and knowing how to recognize and serve the larger whole is a key learning in religious community. Also, sometimes the right thing for the community is the “wrong” thing for an individual; for example, someone who seeks to hold power, but is not trusted by the congregation, may need to learn to step aside for the larger whole, or to find ways of behaving that lead to trust rather than concern. Developing a religious community calls us to step outside of ourselves, become better people than we thought possible, and connect in deeper ways.

### **Tension between Internal and External Focus**

A further tension in congregational life revolves around the questions, Whom are we here for? Are we here for those who gather inside our walls every week, or are we here for people outside our walls? Should we take care of only ourselves, or do we owe something to the community in which we are located?

These are important questions in work on vision and mission, and they go to the heart of how a congregation defines itself. Although nothing compels a congregation to have an external focus as well as an internal one, what is clear is that congregations that have only an internal focus—taking care of those who somehow find “us”—will have a difficult time sustaining themselves over the long haul. Healthier congregations overall have a focus outside of themselves. They know that they exist not only for the members who are already in the congregation but also for those outside the walls of the congregation who can benefit by a liberal religious message, whether they ever want to become Unitarian Universalists or not. The words of the sage teacher and master Jesus, “Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me,” point to the vibrancy and responsibility to engage with the world around.

Nevertheless, tension can arise, particularly if you are trying to change the congregation from being primarily internally focused to being externally focused. This tension arises from a number of places: concern that the needs of members will be ignored or downplayed in favor of those outside, desire to have one place that is a respite from changing the world as opposed to another place to work for world change, fear of the other and the resulting change, and a number of other valid responses. Helping members work through these concerns is an important part of vision and mission work. By asking the questions “Why are we here?” and “Who should we serve?” the congregation can get closer to knowing what is truly important to it.

The question of internal/external focus may also reveal places where the congregation can take on antiracism, anti-oppression, and multicultural work. Who is it we are welcoming? For whom does this congregation feel safe? Who is at our table and welcomed at our table? This is especially true if the demographics of the community where the congregation is located have changed substantially. What once might have been a neighborhood that reflected the membership of the congregation might now be so different that the membership would be well served to ask, “Why is it that our membership no longer reflects the surrounding community? Is there something we should be doing about this, and are there ways that we can explore sharing the saving message of Unitarian Universalism with those who now surround our congregation? Who is our neighbor?”

### **Broken Promises**

What is also shared among these documents (and in the processes of creating them) is that in all human relationships, commitments can be forgotten, promises discarded, and covenants broken. This happens in at least two ways:

- (1) By intentional or unintentional breaking of a specific covenant or
- (2) By leaving certain people outside the covenant in the first place.

This insight is especially significant for religious liberals, because our critics often charge us with an optimism that neglects the negative side of existence. Not having a shared concept of sin (missing the mark), we too often despair or throw up our hands and walk away from each other when promises are broken. Yet by recognizing that we all mess up, and that we can come back from disappointing each other and create a new, stronger, renewed bond of support and nurture, we can ensure that the vision, mission, and covenant continue to be powerful documents in congregational life.

Additionally, history teaches that our institutions have not always been open to individuals other than those in the dominant group: women, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender

people; those outside a certain economic class; or those perceived to be strangers to the existing group. Too often, rather than straying into unknown or different territory, we step away from the potential by failing to risk growth by engaging and empowering the “other,” however it is defined. When engaging in vision, mission, and covenant work, it is important that both those leading and those involved in the process ask questions about who is, and who is not, at the table. By asking what voices have been heard and what voices are missing—who is present and who is invisible—congregations can begin ensuring that they are more inclusive and intentional about who is a welcome part of them.

Vision, mission, and especially covenants can be broken. Yet they may also be renewed. The power of these documents is their dynamic capacity to confront broken promises, engender forgiveness, reestablish relationships, and renew commitments.

## The Process

**Tip:** Although we refer to vision, mission, and covenant together, it is possible for a congregation to choose to create only one or two of the statements. Which processes and statements your congregation undertakes at a particular time will be determined by your own needs: Do you need the widest vision, a more focused mission, or an articulation of the way that you work together? Excerpt from this manual the parts that will be helpful to your congregation now, understanding that in the “ideal” situation these three processes are part of a whole.

There is no one way to take a congregation through vision, mission, and covenant work. All along the way there are differences due to congregational size and culture. This document offers several different examples of the process, and further in depth information may be found in the sources in the Resources List. However, certain steps are basic to making the process a valuable and living one:

- Creating the team.
- Understanding change process.
- Selling the vision, mission, and/or covenant process.
- Planning the vision, mission, and/or covenant process.
- Creating the vision.
- Creating the mission.
- Creating the covenant.
- Implementation or following through.
- Evaluation.
- Revisiting the vision, mission, and covenant.

**Tip:** The order of creation of the vision, mission, and covenant statements is not fixed. Some congregations like working from the global to the more specific, while other congregations find it useful to develop the covenant first, because the covenant incorporates the congregation’s understanding of how to be with one another. Beginning with the covenant is especially helpful in congregations that have a history of less than civil debate. By ironing out the rules of the game first, the hard work of collaboration on the vision and mission is likely to proceed more smoothly. Some congregations find that doing theological and values work before undertaking any of the steps is a good way to engage the congregation and the process.

The order of the steps is not absolute, but what is important is to ensure that you have a team working together and that the congregation is fully engaged in the process, including the implementation and review stages. As stated earlier, there is little positive to be gained by going through the development stage without the implementation, evaluation, and revisiting stages. Individuals who work hard only to see their results stored away on rolled-up newsprint in a closet will be hard-pressed to enter into other programs and processes of change. To gain buy-in and effectiveness, the whole process needs to be seen as important. If there is no team building or education, if there is no leadership buy-in and congregational involvement, and if the documents are not made “alive” in the congregation, the final result will be frustration.

### **Creating the Team**

Doing the work of vision, mission, and covenant alone is very difficult, if not impossible. It is best to create a team (a committee or task force) of people who feel a commitment to exploring the creation of a congregation’s vision, mission, and/or covenant. The team should be representative of the congregation as a whole, and although the desire to allow anyone to serve is strong, great care should be taken in the selection of team members. Ideally, you want people who are open to new ideas, who work well with others, and who are well-respected by the congregation membership. They should be people who can follow through on commitments and who know how to put individual desires aside and look at what is best for the whole. They should be able to work well in consensus situations and be capable of both self-assertion and compromise. The team should be a balanced representation of the congregation in terms of areas of interest, longevity of membership, leadership experience, and knowledge of the members. The professional leadership (ministers, religious educators, and membership coordinators) may be members of the team; however, it is often better to have someone else chair the team, as the professional leadership often have enough on their plates.

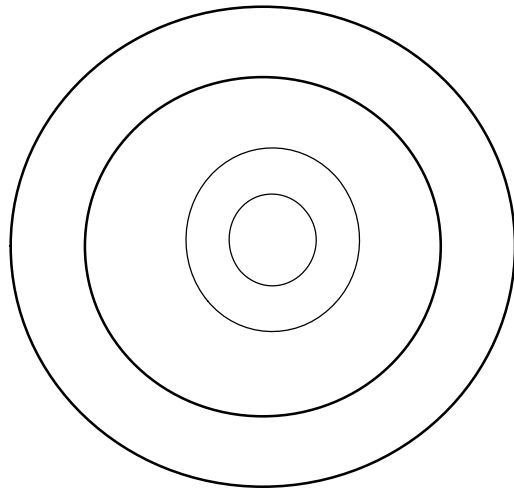
The team should communicate its membership and purpose to the congregation in a variety of ways—through special letters, information in the newsletter, announcements on Sunday mornings, e-mail communication, bulletin board presentations, and special programming such as a worship service or forum presentation. All through the process of vision, mission, and covenant work, the emphasis should be on informing the congregation of the status of the project in a variety of ways. It is always better to have too many avenues of getting the information out than only one that is easily missed.

The team’s first task is to spend time getting to know one another and deciding how to work together. By going on a retreat, team members will get a deeper sense of their individual strengths and skills and be able to figure out how they can best work together. Sample tasks for the retreat can be found in Appendix D.

Next, the team should gather together the congregation's previous vision, mission, and covenant statements, including any historical and current statements. These statements should be reviewed and discussed, including (where possible) what the processes were for the creation of the statements. Understanding how the work has been done in the past, and what process is currently in place, will help inform the team about pitfalls and treasures they may encounter during the process. If no one on the team was present for the creation of the previous statements, the team members may want to invite some "old-timers" in to tell the history from their perspective.

The team will create an initial plan for selling the idea to the leadership of the congregation (which includes the board, others not on the board, and those in formal and informal leadership roles). Even before that takes place, though, it is best for the team to educate itself about the dynamics of change. Knowing what may be encountered in the process is helpful so that any resistance or anxiety that occurs will be understood. Thus, the team members will be able to distinguish ordinary responses to change from other responses that may need a more careful analysis and handling.

Once the change process has been reviewed, the team then creates a process to bring the leadership on board. The process widens out the circle of those who both support the concept of vision, mission, and covenant work and who understand the nature of the reaction to change that might come through the process. Chances are good that the governing board will be asked to deal with the anxiety that arises from change, and if the board members are not in sync with the team on these issues, it may be difficult to provide a united movement toward the implementation of vision, mission, and covenant.



In this diagram of congregational leadership, envision the central circle being the board, the next widest concentric circle being key leaders and committee or task group chairs, the next circle being informal leaders (past official leaders or people with strong leadership skills, regardless of role), and the widest circle being the entire congregation. Ensure that each group is kept informed of the process, and brief the leaders on handling change and resistance.

## Understanding the Change Process

**Tip:** You may already be beyond this step, with the congregation already committed to a vision, mission, and covenant process. If so, you might want to skim this section to understand the difference between technical and adaptive change, and to refresh your understanding of facilitative leadership.

Although every one of us lives in the midst of an ever-changing world, we don't always understand the dynamics of change—the way it happens, our resistance, and the best ways to lead through change at any given time. Entering into vision, mission, and covenant work, especially if your congregation has not done so before or done so recently, is asking the congregation to enter into a process of intentional change. Very few of us are personally comfortable with change, so it becomes important to educate your team on change leadership and management before you

begin so you can help the members understand the nature of change as you go through the process.

## **Dynamics of Change**

In his book *The Way of Transition: Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments*, change theorist William Bridges states that there are three components to change. First, he says, there is the past that you must consciously leave behind. You need to know what has been, and be willing to let it go as you enter into the process. Second are the transitions, or "middle places," where much is unknown. Sociologist Victor Turner calls this the "liminal" phase, when you're neither where you were nor where you will be. This liminal phase can be difficult, for the old is no longer in place, and the new is not yet realized. There can be a lot of ambiguity and anxiety at this time. The third component is the ending, when the goal is in sight, and once again people feel as if there is solid ground underfoot. And if truth be told, this ending is also a new beginning, a place that eventually may need to be left behind.

Every person responds differently to change, and each responds at a different pace. Depending upon the comfort level with change in your membership, you may find that selling the process takes longer than anticipated. Teaching the membership about change is valuable. Good work in this initial phase will smooth the path later on. By helping people early on to know that their concerns will be taken seriously, and by helping them understand the nature of change, it is possible to ease the anxiety that will crop up during the process.

Even for congregations that are used to doing vision, mission, and covenant work, education about the nature of change is important for those who have joined the congregation since it last went through the process. The more informed the membership, the easier it is to work well together through the process.

## **Dynamics of Paradigm Shifts**

It isn't only individuals that have a hard time with change; congregations have their hard times, too. Any institution develops systems and patterns of behavior that seem to endure even as the individuals within the organization change. Roles are created and filled, and both written and unwritten rules are created for how those roles are carried out, regardless of who fills them. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the congregation itself develops an emotional component. It tends toward stability and balance, and a sense that "we've always done it this way." (Refer to the Glossary, page 68 for "paradigm.")

The "doing it this way" is the current paradigm of the congregational system. Paradigms have their own rules and regulations, mostly unwritten, and they shape and form the way we view the world and what is possible. Often the paradigm itself limits or shades what we can see; if something doesn't fit within our understanding

of the world, we often can't see it at all, or we discard it out of hand. Just like we say that fish can't "see" the water they swim in, institutions can't see the "water" they live in, either. Yet the individuals in the institutions can feel the anxiety rise as the unwritten assumptions are challenged. People, often unconsciously, act to reduce the anxiety and attempt to bring the system back into balance by restoring the old, familiar ways. This resistance is always encountered when changing any paradigm.

William Chris Hobgood, in his book *Welcoming Resistance: a Path to Faithful Ministry*, outlines seven stages of resistance to changing a paradigm that are helpful to know as you work through the process of change within your congregation:

1. **Maintaining.** People act in their "ordinary" ways to keep the system the same.
2. **Reinforcing.** People take deliberate interventions to maintain the system (the congregation) as it has been.
3. **Adapting.** People halfheartedly cooperate with change, but there is not yet an internal valuing of the changes.
4. **Revisioning.** People start to look again, and they get fixed on the vision. They may need other people to become involved at this point to carry on the change.
5. **Retooling.** People start looking for tools for the new processes and system, and they gain the ability to be accountable toward the change.
6. **Restructuring.** People begin to change, and they begin to see differently as new structures or ways of behaving appear more clearly.
7. **Transforming.** People finally "get it" and move to the new place, embracing the changes in the system.

Educating people and reminding them of these stages can be a helpful tool; recognizing where you are on the journey is often part of the battle. It helps people realize that others have been there before, and that they can get through it. Remember, though, that stage theories are rarely purely linear, and also that at any point, individuals within the congregation may be at different stages of resistance. Using this material as a guideline, though, will help at least the leaders know that they are on the path.

## Technical and Adaptive Change

In addition to the personal and institutional aspects of change, one encounters challenges due to the existence of two kinds of change: technical and adaptive. Technical challenges involve clearly defined problems, often of a mechanical nature, and the best solution to them is to call in an expert to offer a predetermined solution. For example, when your computer breaks, you call the technician, who knows what buttons to push or which software to reprogram; when your power lines fall down, you call the electric company and allow its experts to fix the problem.

Adaptive challenges are different, for rather than being clear-cut problems with clear-cut solutions, they ask us instead to adapt the way we do things. Adaptive change challenges us to understand our values and our (often hidden) agendas. This is particularly true in congregational life—people joined the church they wanted to be part of, and so by asking them to consider changing the institution, we are asking them to think about changing that which greeted them as "home." The adaptive part of change requires us to ask why we want certain things rather than what things we want.

It may be tempting to simplify these kinds of issues and identify them as needing a technical solution. Sentences about these matters can begin with "It's just a matter of . . ." or "If we only do . . ." The risk in identifying adaptive challenges as technical ones is that it may gloss over what people hold most dear and miss an opportunity to really contend with important congregational business in a healthy way. Additionally, it can sometimes take years to undo the results of hurrying through what seemed at first to be easy solutions to complex adaptive issues.

**Tip:** More information about adaptive change can be found in Chapter 8 of Alice Mann's book *The In-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*.

Beginning a vision, mission, or covenant process is asking people to do adaptive, not technical, change. There is no clear-cut problem with a readily identifiable solution. Rather, you are asking people to uncover the underlying values and meanings of particular aspects of congregational life so that these values, rather than their particular embodiment, are what informs the congregation's life and decisions.

## Facilitative Leadership

The team can help best in this kind of work by being facilitative leaders. (Refer to Appendix E, Facilitative Leadership, on page 75.) Facilitative leadership requires several things. First, as a facilitative leader, you need to resist the expectation that you will take total responsibility for both understanding the problem and developing the solution. Rather, you need to help others understand the nature of the problem and understand their own responses to the situation. Adaptive change requires people to do their own work and understand what the underlying values, issues, and concerns are in order to move forward with less resistance.

Second, facilitative leadership means that you should not move too quickly to reassure people and lessen their concerns and anxiety. People need to see the potential threats before them so that they can also feel free to move into seeing the potential benefits before them. People need to understand the costs involved—both of moving forward into a new way and of not moving forward. They need to weigh these costs carefully as they make their decision.

Third, your job is not to reinforce expected roles. Rather, be curious about the way roles are shifting, and what the shifts might allow to happen in the congregation. What will happen if you begin to think of "doing church" from a vision, mission, and covenant perspective? Ask the hard questions and even what might seem subversive. Some of the subversive questions may be about whose voice is present, and who is absent in the conversation. Check to see if there are particular groups—especially people of color and other historically marginalized groups—who are not being represented, and ask questions about that. Are these individuals present in the life of the congregation? If so, why are they not at the table? What about children—where are they in the process? These kinds of questions can often make people uncomfortable, so remember that your job is not to provide the answers, but to help people figure out how to work through the adaptive change work that is required.

Fourth, you will need to resist the pressure to restore order immediately by returning to the way things have always been done. A desire to return to the "normal" state arises out of anxiety, and anxiety is a by-product of change. This anxiety may be particularly apparent as you challenge the paradigms and ask the questions about who is not present or being heard. Your job in the face of this anxiety or other moves to return to the "usual" is to help people recognize the discomfort and then to encourage them to stay in that discomfort; they then can make a conscious choice about the process rather than simply moving back to the way things are by default.

Fifth, the facilitative leader allows the unwritten rules and norms of the congregation's life to be examined and challenged. The current paradigm must be made visible so that people can begin to choose what parts of that paradigm they

wish to retain, and which to change. Looking at “the way we’ve always done it” is an important part of deciding whether or not to do something new.

Another important part of facilitative leadership is ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate. Stay attuned to who is speaking and who is not. Help provide opportunities for quieter persons to be involved. One simple way is to have a period of silence for reflection and individual journaling following each question so that those who need the space have a chance to think before the more talkative people fill up the silence.

### **Selling the Process**

There are many different ways to sell the idea of beginning vision, mission, and covenant work, but the best place to start is with the leadership. Some congregational change professionals believe that without the support of at least three-quarters of the leadership, it is difficult to initiate anything new in congregational life. Leadership, in this sense, includes not only the elected leadership but also those who have unofficial leadership by virtue of former position, deep respect, and lasting influence in the congregation. Yet every congregation is different. Some congregations have a handful of people who, if they support an idea, can get it to go. In other congregations any kind of change work is next to impossible without convincing the entire congregation to be a part. You will have to feel your way through this, but it is a good idea to build as large a consensus as possible in your leadership group before proceeding. As you go through the process, you will know that you have a problem if key individuals are boycotting the meetings or speaking against them. If this happens, take a step back and do more of the marketing work by returning to the whole question and trying to uncover what the resistance means. Although resistance can be frustrating, it can provide clues as to where more information, support, or listening is needed.

**Tip:** In smaller congregations, it might be easier to begin the step of selling the process with the entire membership, as the proportion of leaders is greater than in larger congregations. Larger congregations may have more leaders in actual number, but the proportion of the congregation that needs to be involved will be less.

There are several ways to engage the leadership. The overall goal is to provide opportunities for extensive open dialogue about the benefits, drawbacks, and risks of vision, mission, and covenant work. It is helpful to provide the leadership with a summary of what vision, mission, and covenant work is about, as well as an outline of a possible process. You may find that members of other congregations that have gone through the process might be helpful in answering questions and concerns. You can learn about these congregations from your district staff members. Sharing

this document with congregational leaders may also help fulfill their information needs. The main work at this point is to help the leaders understand the nature of the change that you are undertaking—the adaptive work that is part of moving into a new way of doing things. The team may want to “try out” its ideas on how to involve the membership by walking the leadership through one or more of the processes that will be implemented later with the whole congregation.

Providing leaders the opportunity to express their concerns and expectations in a nonanxious, nondirective way not only helps them understand the process but also models ways in which fears about the divisiveness of such conversations can be lessened. By modeling good behavior and process, the leaders can see how vision, mission, and covenant work can energize the congregation. This goal can be best accomplished by letting go of your own expectations about the outcome. If you cannot persuade the leaders that vision, mission, and covenant work is a good idea, then you need to do more work to bring them along or delay the process until some other issue is dealt with first.

### **Planning the Process**

Once the team has received the support of the leadership of the congregation, it is time to finish planning the process for the whole congregation. The feedback and questions from the leadership will give you a sense of what questions and concerns the general membership may have.

Whatever the specifics of the plan for the process, certain elements are critically important:

- **Permit enough time to engage the widest possible participation in the process.** Make sure that the congregation understands what is being proposed. The greater the input, the more likely that everyone (or at least a plurality) will own the results.
- **Include a variety of opportunities for input and involvement.** If possible, provide several different options for the time and day of meetings, taking into account the needs of various special groups such as senior citizens, parents of small children, single parents, youth and young adults, people who work during the day, and those who work less conventional shifts. As you go through the process, be open to adding additional ways of meeting for those groups that are not yet involved.
- **Keep extensive notes and records of what has happened throughout the process.** This information can be used in future vision, mission, and covenant processes to improve them based on current learnings. Also, by having the records handy, people who enter the congregation’s life between vision, mission, and covenant processes can understand the nature, place, and role of the process in the life of the congregation.

- **Use visual and audiovisual presentations when possible.** Remember that not everyone learns best by listening or by reading, and that by engaging all the ways of learning (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic), you will be able to reach a wider percentage of the membership. Any tangible objects created along the way, such as banners, should be saved, because they may become lasting symbols of the congregation's accomplishments.
- **Plan for informal social events as part of the process.** Not only does a good cup of coffee or tea entice people to come out but it also creates an atmosphere of caring and goodwill that may help during any difficult conversations that may arise throughout the process. When people's physical and safety needs are taken care of, they are more willing to risk the difficult work of adaptive change. Pay particular attention to scheduling events.
- **Celebrate the milestones of the process.** Hold special services to honor the creation of the vision, mission, and/or covenant, taking time to thank those who worked hard to bring the process forward.
- **View the production of the vision, mission, and covenant statements not as the end of the process but only as the first stage of moving the congregation into a new way of being.** The statements should be used as resources in congregational life for new member orientations; publicity; religious education programs; and making key decisions about the time, talents, and treasures of the congregation.

The process plan must take into consideration the size of the congregation. The larger the congregation, the more different opportunities for participation must be planned. In a small congregation, it might be easy to gain over a 60 percent participation rate, but in a larger one, the participation rate may be less than one-third. Pay attention to your congregation's culture: Do you need to have a large percentage of the congregation involved in the direct shaping of the statements, or is it sufficient to have a small group working on the statements and then presenting a draft for congregational approval? What works well in one congregation of one size may not work well in another congregation of the same size, while a process that works well in a particular large congregation may also work in a particular small congregation. Whatever process the team chooses, it should be open to modification and should provide for the eventual acceptance of the statements by the membership.

**Tip:** Remember to include ways for the young people to be involved. They can be gathered together and asked what they think is most important about church, or they can be invited to draw pictures of what they'd like to see added to the church. Don't assume that the adults have all the good ideas!

The process plan should include opportunities for individuals to participate in small groups and to hear from others involved in such groups. Questionnaires, surveys, and interviews can be used to gather information from those who are not able to be present during the process. The results of the groups and individual responses should be brought back together, and a rough draft should be created. This rough draft should be presented to the congregation informally for feedback and critique; a "final" statement then should be presented to the membership for formal adoption at a congregational meeting. This same process of small groups, draft statement, and final adoption can be followed for the vision, mission, and covenant statements either separately or all together. Some congregations find that a congregation-wide retreat (complete with a children's program) is a good process for creating the vision, with the mission and covenant work then done "at home" over a period of weeks and months. Again, the process should always be reviewed to see who is included and who is not.

Once the mission has been approved by the congregation, the next step is to develop mission objectives to make it come alive. Suggestions for how this can be accomplished are presented following this section, beginning on page 32. Finally, the team's process plan should include a method of evaluation and review of the vision, mission, and/or covenant. The plan can also specify how the next team will be chosen when the statements are to be next reviewed.

### **Change Agent and Advocate**

Once the congregational leadership and governing body have decided to proceed with the vision, mission, and/or covenant work and you have put the plan together, it is time for the team to switch from facilitative leadership to being change agents and advocates for the process. Whereas facilitative leadership is the best kind to use when seeking consensus—or a blessing—to move into this process, the kind of leadership needed to actually carry out the process is that of advocate or change agent. Because people rarely want to change, and institutions change even more slowly than individuals, the team will need to act as cheerleaders and judges to help propel the process forward while not being domineering or overwhelming in their enthusiastic support for the program.

John Kotter, a respected management consultant, sets out the steps that an advocate leader can take to guide people through transition in his book *Leading Change*. The method involves establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a compelling and sensible vision, communicating in a variety of ways and a great number of times, empowering broad-based action, generating and celebrating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring new approaches in the culture. Details of Kotter's suggestions can be found in Appendix I on page 89.

## Creating the Vision

People come to a religious community for a variety of reasons. Some come for community, others seek the holy, others come for the chance to be with like-minded people, and still others look for the chance to change the world together. Yet underneath it all, each congregation has a sometimes unarticulated sense of what it is and what it wants to be. The vision process is intended to bring the commonalities to the surface and help the congregation articulate where it wants to be in five years' time. The goal is not just to have a statement you can publish in your congregation's membership brochure or on the cover of the order-of-service. The goal is to engage the congregation in a process that clarifies its ultimate and guiding purposes.

There are several different ways to create a vision statement. Some congregations do it as part of a congregational retreat, while others do it as part of a single-day program or one that takes place over several weeks. Some congregations create a vision statement as part of worship, while others use lifespan faith development religious education as a vehicle for creating the shared vision.

Whichever method is used, make sure that it is easy for people to take part in by giving plenty of advance notice and providing child care and children's activities. You may wish to incorporate social time, such as a refreshment break. Beginning with a chalice lighting and reading will impart the feeling that this is an important event. You may wish to have an outside facilitator assist, but that is not necessary. Make sure that you allow adequate time for the process to unfold; rushing people through these important steps doesn't contribute to a good process. If exercises take longer than you originally thought they would, stop and talk with the members about that fact. Then work out a way you can continue the process, either through having additional sessions or perhaps agreeing to allow a smaller group to complete the activity and bring the results back for the larger group's input and feedback. Remember, the secret to a good vision, mission, and covenant process is making it easy and fun for people to be involved.

The following are three examples of the vision creation process.

## Sample Vision Program 1: Guided Imagery for a Group

This program can be run in a morning, afternoon, or a longish evening. The program works well with teenagers on up to seniors. Provide a variety of spaces for people to sit and work—some will want to work at tables, others may prefer comfortable chairs, and still others may want to sit on the floor. For those working in chairs, provide clipboards or other surfaces for ease in writing. Make sure that there are pens, pencils, crayons, and other materials available for participants to jot down their reactions. You will need newsprint and markers for every three people, as well as tape for posting the results. You can begin the program with simple chalice lighting and reading to set the stage.

**Tip:** You may also decide to hold this program several times, and then either have the team bring the results together or provide a final wrap-up session where you share the results of the various groups and then go through the process of compiling the individual and unique themes from the various sessions.

Step 1. Invite the participants to relax and use their imaginations to dream of a compelling but practical future for your congregation in five or ten years. Provide file cards or paper for them to jot down the images, thoughts, feelings, and words that occur to them during the exercise. Here are some sample words for the guided imagery.

**Tip:** Make sure you have read through the guided imagery instructions several times before leading a session. Change anything that is not applicable to your congregation. If you don't have your own building, you might want to include comments asking participants to imagine the sort of place where you will be meeting five or ten years from now. Some people find that playing soft, nondistracting music in the background aids in the guided imagery, and some people find that sitting in front of a blank wall, rather than facing others, works best. Before you begin, encourage people to become comfortable in whatever way works for them. Invite them to move until they get to that best place for them. Also, it can help to invite them to breathe deeply for several breaths before you begin; others find that suggesting to people that they leave behind their cares and worries is a good beginning to the visualization. Make sure you allow silent times, too, for individuals to create and deepen their imaginings.

**Tip:** Another example of a guided imagery meditation can be found in *Churchworks: A Well-Body Book for Congregations*, by Anne Odin Heller.

We all have a vision for our congregation. It informs some of our involvement and continued education in our life together. This vision, though often unarticulated, exists like a moving picture in our imagination. Allow that moving picture of our congregation to become more explicit. As we engage in this process, relax and allow the vision to appear to you, rather than deliberately trying to create it. As images, thoughts, feelings, or words occur to you, jot them down on the paper, remembering to stay with these images, thoughts, or feelings long enough. Then, even with your eyes half-opened, write down the essence of your imaginary experience. Don't interrupt the flow of your imagination to write. Consider that you are taking still frames from the moving picture of your vision, and just jot down phrases that describe these still frames.

In your imagination, approach a compelling, but practical, vision of our congregation five or ten years from now. What is the feeling of anticipation you experience in yourself as you do this? Imagine yourself approaching the neighborhood or the community where our congregation is located. What do you notice about this surrounding neighborhood or community? Who are the people that live here? What are their needs and desires?

Approach now in your imagination the actual location where our congregation meets. What does the landscape look like—how does the facility appear on the outside? What does it say about the congregation?

Now open the doors to the meeting place. What do you notice? Who is gathered there? In what activities are these people engaged? Who is missing from the picture? What is the atmosphere like? How does it feel to be there? What are the aesthetics of the place? Tour the building, and visit the various activities that are occurring in the building.

**Tip:** The leader should allow sufficient time for this tour to take place.

In your imagination, allow yourself to get a sense of the worship, education, outreach, and fellowship of this congregation . . . as you deeply hope and imagine it to be five or ten years from now.

Stay with whatever images, thoughts, feelings, and events occur to you. When you are ready, jot down just the essence of what presents itself to you. Spend the next five minutes in this exercise of imagination.

**Tip:** One way to include children in this exercise would be to get them to draw their ideal church. Then, by creating intergenerational groups for sharing, adults could help the young people give input by capturing their words as they explain the drawings. It might be helpful to others, too, to try drawing as a way to express their response to the imagery.

**Another tip:** Rather than jotting down words or phrases, ask them to draw a picture or draw images of their vision, and then talk about what they drew.

Step 2. Invite participants to meet with two other people. In groups of three, each person takes five minutes to share his or her vision with the others. This is not a time to deliberate or discuss. It is a time to listen for some of the common and unique themes that emerge. At the end of fifteen minutes, give the group five minutes to list on a piece of newsprint some of the common and unique themes that they heard among the members of the group.

**Tip:** An alternative way of proceeding is to have the small groups work to come to one common vision for the congregation. They then report this common vision back to the whole group. The leader can then call again for the common themes and values.

Step 3. Get back together as a whole group. Invite each small group to share the common themes that they heard.

Step 4. Solicit some of the common and unique themes from the whole group. Reflect together on this information. Write these on newsprint under the headings "Common Themes," and on another sheet, "Unique Themes."

Step 5. Invite a few participants or a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take these sheets of common and unique themes and draft a vision statement that can be circulated among the congregation for thought and reflection before refinement. It may be helpful to provide this group with the criteria for a good vision statement in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. (Refer to the section "Criteria for a Good Vision Statement," page 41, which follows the sample processes for vision statements.)

**Tip:** Another way of proceeding would be to list a series of values on a flip chart page and give each participant three or four colored dots and then ask the participants to "vote" on their highest values by placing the dots near their favorite values. The top vote getters would then be used as the basis for the draft vision statement. Examples of values would be terms such as justice, love, salvation, beauty, cleanliness, patience, kindness, frugality, peace, and so on.

After the draft vision statement is created, it should be presented for conversation among the members. The team should then create the final vision statement, incorporating the concerns and wishes expressed in the review process, for presentation to the congregation members for ratification at a congregational meeting.

## Sample Vision Program 2: Individual Reflection

This vision exercise, proposed in *Marketing for Congregations: Choosing to Serve People More Effectively*, (refer to Resources list, page 97) can be incorporated into the worship or spiritual practice of a congregation for approximately a month. At the end of this time, the congregation is invited to meet in small groups to share some of the common themes of their collective vision.

Step 1. Invite members of the congregation to spend at least a month in sessions of individual meditation or reflection on the question, what is your vision of our congregation five or ten years from now? You might suggest that they spend two brief periods alone each week (for example, fifteen minutes each time), in addition to a brief period of reflection together in each of the worship services during that month. Toward the end of this period of reflection, they should begin to make a visual representation of their vision, a one-page narrative, or both of the images, ideas, and feelings that occurred to them.

**Tip:** If your congregation has a midweek education activity, a quiet time for individual reflection could be added to that. You also might want to provide a quiet space or room after each service where people could go and begin to create their image or statement. Make sure there are both drawing and writing supplies available to make it easier on the members.

Step 2. Hold a congregational meeting or gathering in which members in groups of three to five present their vision to one another. Each group should record the “Common Themes” and “Unique Themes” on sheets of newsprint and then present these themes to the whole group.

**Tip:** Another way of proceeding would be to list a series of values on a flip chart page and give each participant three or four colored dots and then ask the participants to “vote” on their highest values by placing the dots near their favorite values. The top vote getters would then be used as the basis for the draft vision statement. Examples of values would be terms such as justice, love, salvation, beauty, cleanliness, patience, kindness, frugality, peace, and so on.

Step 3. Invite a few of the participants or a task group (or the vision, mission, or covenant team) to take these sheets of common and unique themes and draft a vision statement that can be circulated among the congregation for thought and reflection before refinement. It may be helpful to provide this group with the criteria for a good vision statement in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (see Resources list, page 96) to aid them in their work. (Refer to the section “Criteria for a Good Vision Statement,” page 41, which follows the sample processes for vision statements.)

After the draft vision statement is created, it should be presented for conversation among the members. The team should then create the final vision statement, incorporating the concerns and wishes expressed in the review process, for presentation to the congregation members for ratification at a congregational meeting.

### Sample Vision Program 3: Small Group Meetings and Time Line

This program provides a chance for members to reflect on their impressions of the shared core values of the congregation through use of a time line. A member of the team should be at each meeting to facilitate the conversation, and someone should be chosen as a recorder to collect the thoughts. This program can be done either several times, in smaller gatherings, or one or two times, with all members invited. If there are more than fifteen to twenty people at the gathering, consider dividing them up (according to various lengths of membership) and having each group construct its own time line to share with others. (You will need additional facilitators on hand for this option.) It is best, though, to work toward a diverse group that represents varying lengths of time in the congregation. This way the newcomers can hear the history of the congregation from the old-timers, and the old-timers can see the shifts since they made their choice of affiliation.

Preparation for the time line activity involves a basic understanding of the congregation's history—the various eras and stages of its development. A time line should be created on three-foot-wide paper approximately twenty-five feet long; it should include the starting date of the congregation, the basic stages and eras, and the future. Key events, such as the change of ministerial leadership, acquiring and remodeling property, and other major occurrences in the congregation, should be plotted along the time line in different colors to differentiate the various events. This time line should be posted on a wall so the participants can see it and so that you can add their comments and recollections. You should also have paper available for others to jot down their reflections as they participate in the gathering.

**Tip:** More information on time lines can be found on pages 209 to 210 in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. (See Resources list, page 96.)

Step 1. Review the events that you have put on the time line that mark off the different eras of the congregation's life. Ask for other key events that members think have shaped or revealed the shape of the congregation's life. They could include special programming, social action projects, and other key events. You do not need to work in chronological order, but ensure that you write the new material at the appropriate position on the time line.

Step 2. Ask each participant to identify when he or she arrived at the congregation, and mark these on the time line. Get participants to comment on what drew them to the congregation and what has kept them there.

Step 3. Get the participants to add key events in the community, region, nation, or world, as well as how the congregation responded to these events, if at all. These events could include wars, elections, natural or human-made disasters, recessionary periods, civil rights struggles, and any other telling event.

Step 4. Encourage those who have not yet participated to add whatever details and information they think needs to be put on the time line.

Step 5. Either as a large group or in smaller groups of three, reflect on the values and core beliefs that are expressed through the congregation's history. Are there common values that run through the congregation's life? What are the unique themes they see? Record the "Common Themes" and "Unique Themes" on newsprint. If this step is being done in small groups, get the small groups to report back the common and the unique themes, and compile them into one list.

**Tip:** Another way of proceeding would be to give each participant three or four colored dots and then ask them to "vote" on their highest values by placing the dots near their favorite values. The top vote getters would then be used as the basis for the draft vision statement.

Step 6. Invite a few of the participants or a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take these sheets of common and unique themes and draft a vision statement that can be circulated among the congregation for thought and reflection before refinement. It may be helpful to provide this group with the criteria for a good vision statement in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. (Refer to the section "Criteria for a Good Vision Statement," page 41, which follows the sample processes for vision statements.)

After the draft vision statement is created, it should be presented for conversation among the members. The team should then create the final vision statement, incorporating the concerns and wishes expressed in the review process, for presentation to the congregation members for ratification at a congregational meeting.

## Criteria for a Good Vision Statement

Certain criteria tend to help make a vision statement better. Pay attention to them as you prepare and consider the final vision statement. The following list comes from *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (See Resources list, page 96). It might be helpful to share this list with the individuals creating the draft statement and to review the criteria with the congregation members prior to their consideration for adoption. A good vision statement has these characteristics:

- The vision is faithful to the congregation's best understanding of its religious heritage.
- The vision statement is oriented to the future, providing a statement of the congregation's desired future.
- The vision is appropriate to the specific congregation, bearing in mind its history, culture, size, resources, location, and capacities, as well as what its members care deeply about.
- The vision statement is realistic in terms of the congregation's social context.
- The vision statement contains both judgment and promise, by articulating the different future it wishes to create.
- The vision is a shared image of the desired future, growing out of the stated wishes and desires of the membership.
- The vision statement is specific enough to provide direction for the congregation's life, but broad enough to include multiple but complementary visions important to groups within the congregation.

## Creating the Mission

The mission statement is a further step toward implementing the vision statement. It sets out how the congregation should focus its programs, activities, and finances in order to fulfill its vision. The mission statement should relate your congregation to your community context by establishing your sense of religious identity, relating it to the needs of those you aim to serve, and articulating what you must do to live out that mission. The statement may wrestle with the question of internal and external focus—do we serve those among us, those outside our doors, or some combination of the two?

Because of the complexity of the issue, it is best to focus the mission process from the beginning. One way to do so is to keep in mind the essential question: Given who we are, and where we are, and what we want to become, what should we do? This question becomes paramount, and it may be helpful to return to it again and again, both in the development process and in the implementation phase. “Given who we are” is the issue of congregational identity; “where we are” is the issue of context, both that of the congregation (age, race, sex, income, orientation, and so on) and that of the wider community (neighborhood, region, state, district, country, and so on); “what we want to become” is the issue of vision and the dreams of the congregation; and “what should we do” is the issue of mission.

Again, paying attention to hospitality is key. Ensure adequate notice, and provide child care and activities for the younger people who won’t participate in the process. You may want to explore creating a process for the elementary school–aged young people and adopting the processes for adults to include teenagers and youth. Create an inviting atmosphere and possibility for everyone, paying attention to who can come during the evenings, weekends, and days. Consider offering a variety of time options to increase your participation rate.

The following are three examples of the mission creation process.

## Sample Mission Process 1: Questions

This mission process is a chance for people to be asked important questions and provide the answers in an atmosphere of attentive listening. You will need paper, pens, and pencils for every person, plus clipboards or other writing surfaces. Additionally, every twosome will need newsprint and marker to record answers. You may wish to provide colored sticker dots to allow for “voting,” should you choose that option.

This process can be done during a weekend retreat or a workshop with a couple of meetings so that the team creating the draft statement has time to complete the task. A retreat setting allows less chance for attrition. Its other advantage over multiple meetings is that less time is required to brief individuals who join the process for the second meeting only.

Again, creating a hospitable setting and providing for the needs of the participants helps the work move along well. Provide child care and children’s programming. You may want to begin and end with readings and with lighting, and then extinguishing, the chalice.

Step 1. Write the following questions on newsprint, and post them at several visible locations in your meeting space: What is the mission of our religious community? What is really our mission?

Step 2. Ask the participants to form subgroups of two persons each. You might want to recommend that they work with someone they know less well as an opportunity to create new connections in the congregation. Each person then asks the other the two questions in Step 1 and records the answers. This process is repeated twice, so that each person has answered the questions three times: Person A is asked the questions with Person B recording A’s answers; Person B is asked the questions with Person A recording B’s answers; and then the cycle is repeated twice (B asking, A asking, B asking, and A asking). At the conclusion of the three cycles, the recorder gives the participants their own written answers. They review their own responses and circle the responses they consider most important. As a couple of ground rules, there should be no discussion of the responses, and the participants must ask each other the questions three times.

Step 3. Combine each twosome with another twosome to create groups of four. Put all the responses that were considered most important on a sheet of newsprint. The foursome then writes a mission statement that incorporates the views of the four persons and transfers it to newsprint.

Another alternative is to have the members of the foursome write their most important responses on newsprint and then post them. These responses are shared

aloud. Participants then are given colored sticker dots and asked to go and “vote” for their top three or four responses, either their own or other responses that capture their interest. The results are given to the task group, which next creates a draft statement for the congregation. (It may be helpful to eliminate duplicate responses before participants vote with their dots.)

Step 4. The statements or most important words created by the foursomes are then shared with the whole group. If they desire to do so, the group can enter into a conversation about the common themes and the unique themes found in these draft mission statements or lists of most important words.

Step 5. Designate a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take the written work from the groups of four and develop a draft mission statement that incorporates all the others.

**Tip:** If the mission process is part of a weekend retreat, the task group (or team) can work on this draft mission statement during a break and then present the results to the participants. Otherwise, an additional meeting a week or two later can be called to continue the steps of this mission process.

Step 6. Reconvene the whole group to review the proposed mission statement. This is a time for clarification, further definition, and explanation—not for writing a new statement. A recorder from the task group (the vision, mission, and covenant team) should record the responses, and it may be helpful to ask the members to express their agreement or disagreement with various parts of the draft statement.

**Tip:** You may wish to use this second meeting as a chance to list some of the ways to make the mission statement more specific; these specifics will be helpful when you follow through on the mission statement by creating goals and objectives, covered later in this manual. For example, if your mission is to “transform the world,” you might list some of these goals: to survey the needs of the community, to determine where our congregation might be a catalyst for action, and to identify and carry out one congregational program or service that fulfills a major unmet community need.

Step 7. The task group or team meets again at another time to refine the draft mission statement and then presents it to the congregation for adoption at a congregational meeting.

It may be helpful to provide this group with John Carver's criteria for a good vision statement to aid them in their work. (Refer to the section "Criteria for a Good Mission Statement," page 49, which follows the sample processes for mission statements.)

## Sample Mission Process 2: Community Field Trip

This mission process begins with thoughts about those outside the walls of the congregation and asks the members to explore the context of the local community in which they have their religious home. It is a chance for them to understand where they are located and to allow that knowledge to help them articulate what they want to be to the community. This exercise is particularly helpful in congregations that have been predominantly internally focused; as they see, meet, and understand the people and needs in their geographic community, they may well discover new reasons for being a religious community. The exercise is also a way to gain background information that will be helpful in the implementation phase of the mission statement process. It is a way to create a mission that is meaningful to the community and to the members, because they are the ones who recognized the necessary mission.

**Tip:** The book *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, (pages 47 to 50), contains many helpful suggestions on how to do community tours.

This mission process requires a fair amount of preparation before the event. The preparation includes determining which specific activities you want the members to do. Will they walk or drive around the neighborhood? You may choose to have some walk, and others drive. Are there places you want to ensure that they find? Write up a list of questions to help them out, and leave space for them to come up with their own discoveries. Make large-scale maps of your neighborhood available, both to help people navigate and as a place for participants to jot down their observations.

**Tip:** Think about including questions about pedestrian and vehicular traffic, stores and other shopping destinations, the services available, the people who live here, the housing, whether people are moving in or out, the kinds of diversity, products manufactured in the vicinity, children and where they go to school, the seniors and those with disabilities, medical and dental offices, veterinarians, graffiti, and where people play. Who from your congregation lives or works here? What do the back roads and alleys tell you? What other religious institutions are in the area? Are there areas that feel particularly dangerous or safe? Is this a place where you would want to live? These are just samples of questions that can prime the pump of your members' minds.

Are there key leaders and neighbors you want interviewed? If so, find out if they can be available on the day of your exercise, and make sure you set up appointments with them. See if they would be willing to do two or three 15-minute interviews, and then prepare a few questions to help your members know what to ask. You will probably want to aim at two people to interview per interview team. Prepare maps to the interview location for your participants.

**Tip:** Sample questions for community leaders may include the following: Who lives here? What are the most pressing issues facing the community? What are the ways in which you (and your organization, department, or other group) are helping out? What is your biggest fear? Where do you see hope?

This process should be well advertised, and child care and children's programming should be provided for those who wish to attend. If you are planning a walking tour, make sure you let people know so that they can wear appropriate footwear. Also make sure that there are options for those who wish to participate but are not able to do the walking. Dividing participants up into walkers who will explore the near neighborhood and riders/drivers who will explore the farther reaches of the community gives you a greater wealth of information and helps ensure that everyone who wishes to participate can join in. You will need to provide each participant with a large-scale map, paper and pen, a writing surface, and colored sticker dots for voting. Give the group newsprint and markers to record their answers. As always, hospitality is a big part of any event you create. You may want to include a light lunch as part of this day's activities so you won't have to rush any of the steps. You may begin the gathering with a chalice lighting and short readings.

Step 1. As the people arrive, begin to create teams of four people, including walking teams, riding teams, and interviewing teams. Make sure each riding team includes someone who is willing to drive. Each group should choose at least one recorder, who will annotate the findings on the large-scale map. Provide each participant with the relevant list of questions and the map that is appropriate for its activity. Once everyone is gathered and assigned to a team, send them on their way with the request that they return in an hour.

Step 2. When the teams return, give them fifteen to twenty minutes to organize their presentation on what they found. Once the teams are ready, have them report what they found to the whole group while someone records the salient facts on newsprint and on a large-scale map of the area. For the interviews, create separate newsprint lists of the needs and wishes of the various community leaders.

Step 3. Once the reporting back is complete, ask the group to reflect on what it has heard and learned. Ask the members to keep silent for about five minutes as they each answer these questions, in their own minds: What surprises me the most? Where do I feel most drawn to make a difference?

Step 4. Have the participants share the answers to their questions in their team, jotting down the basic answers on newsprint. Once every member of the team has been able to share, ask the teams to share their responses with the whole group.

Step 5. Give each participant three colored sticker dots, and ask each to “vote” for the areas to which they feel most drawn to make a difference.

**Tip:** You may need to group together similar responses to help reduce duplication before voting.

Step 6. Designate a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take the voted-upon priorities for action from the participants and develop a draft mission statement that incorporates these desires for presentation to the congregation. It may be helpful to provide this group with John Carver’s criteria for a good vision statement to aid them in their work. For more information on the Carver method go to, [www.carvergovernance.com/](http://www.carvergovernance.com/). (Refer to the section “Criteria for a Good Mission Statement,” page 49, which follows the sample processes for mission statements.)

Step 7. Provide members with a copy of the draft mission statement that the task group or team developed, and arrange times for members to come together to discuss the statement and provide feedback. Have the task group or team incorporate the feedback into the statement. The revised draft mission statement then should be presented for adoption to the congregation at a congregational meeting.

## Criteria for a Good Mission Statement

John Carver, author of *Boards That Make a Difference*, (refer to Resources list, page 96) has developed a checklist to evaluate a mission statement. Pay attention to the following questions, adapted from his work, as you create your mission statement

- Does your mission statement address what difference your congregation makes for the broader community or does it merely describe what your congregation is doing?
- Does the language in your mission statement allow your congregation to accomplish goals rather than state what it intends to do? For example, tentative words like tries or seeks are not appropriate for a mission statement. Rather in a mission statement a congregation says where it wants to go, not where it might go.
- Is your congregation's mission statement too long? Can it be easily recalled or its essence easily communicated?
- Is your mission statement too broad or too narrow? (Brainstorm about the effects that your congregation might have on the world; then rank order these effects and discuss their relative merit.)
- How does your congregation's mission statement relate to, and differentiate your congregation from, other faith communities and other Unitarian Universalist congregations?

## Creating the Covenant

A covenant statement tells people how you want to be with one another. It sets out the qualities that will sustain your life together, and it contains the promises you make to one another in religious community. It answers the question, what are the qualities we want in our life and work together?

Covenants center on the values that are held dear in community, be it religious community or secular community. The stakes are higher in religious communities, however. People come to religious communities hoping to find a place that is as good as its word—where people are valued and treated well, and where they can find strength and resources for making their own homes more open and generous places. Disappointment runs very high when congregations fail to live up to people’s internal expectations—when people don’t act like good religious people “should.” Covenants can help people articulate those internal expectations, and written covenant statements can provide people with a feeling of safety: This is a congregation that will expect me (and others) to behave well.

The covenant can also acknowledge the fact that our congregations generally are not something that we create but rather are something that we receive from those who have gone before, and something that we will leave for those who will follow. As the Reverend Rebecca Parker, president of Starr King School for the Ministry, said, “We receive who we are before we choose who we will become. We inherit covenant before we create covenant. Covenant is, first-most, not a verbal agreement but a practice.” Knowing that a covenant is a recognition of what has been, as well as how we want to be with one another, we can also make it reflect the kind of institution and institutional practice that we wish to bequeath to those who will follow. This orientation also allows the inclusion of the holy, however it is defined, as a participant in the covenant.

It is important to note that all congregations have covenants—ways in which it is acceptable to interact with one another—but not every congregation has an explicit written covenant statement. Having the statement created and written makes the implied real. It then becomes a touchstone that people can refer to when times get testy in congregational life. When tempers get frayed or people get impatient with one another, the covenant can be recalled to remind people of what they said they would promise one another. By having the membership create the statement, they gain ownership and a sense of authority to call others back to the covenant in difficult times.

**Tip:** Belonging: The Meaning of Membership, a report of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Commission on Appraisal, may be a valuable resource for those seeking background information on what congregations can promise to their members and what members can promise to their congregations. Refer to the on-line version at UUA.org by going to the Leaders' Library and searching "Belonging."\*

Although the covenant might be used to smooth out rough times when they occur, it is best that the covenant itself not be created during rough times. When tensions arise in congregations, people don't feel safe, and too often the trend is to want to legislate better behavior rather than really talk about what it means to be a religious community. During the rough times it is better to enter into appropriate conflict resolution; once the good feelings have returned, then the congregation can consider entering into the creation of a covenant statement.

It is often best to begin the covenant work with a global covenant—one that will cover the interactions of everyone in the congregation—and then, if desired, to enter into specific covenants concerning special groups within the congregation. The latter could include, for example, covenants between and among professional staff, people working with children and youth, congregation and minister emeritus, congregation and minister, congregation and religious educator, or congregation and music director. All these specific covenants, though, will benefit from being grounded by the existence of a more global covenant statement. The covenant should be the spirit, not the law; any particular requirements (such as criminal background checks for individuals working with children) should be spelled out in policy documents, not in the covenant itself.

**Tip:** Congregations looking to create covenants to prevent peer or child abuse, or to deal with clergy misconduct, should consider using the Unitarian Universalist Association's Creating Safe Congregations curriculum, available from the UUA Bookstore. For information go to [UUA.org/bookstore](http://UUA.org/bookstore).

**Tip:** The Unitarian Universalist Association has a covenanting process designed specifically for use with religious educators. This document can be found at [UUA.org](http://UUA.org) by clicking Leaders then Leaders' Library and by searching 'Covenanting.'

A sense of fairness and safety must surround the covenant process even more so than the vision and mission processes, for this is the time when people will risk saying what it is they need to feel safe. It is almost a paradox—providing the safety to be able to say what makes us feel safe—but it is something that is necessary. As with the other processes, hospitality is necessary. Make sure you announce the sessions well in advance, offer child care and children's programming, and provide a chance for social interaction. If there has been recent tension concerning how people behave toward one another, consider having an outside facilitator whom the congregation membership knows and trusts to ensure that people feel safe. As stated above, a covenant statement should not be created during a conflict, but only when members of the congregation are doing well with one another.

## Sample Covenant Process 1: Promises

The following covenant process is adapted from one developed at Second Unitarian Universalist Church of Chicago during the Unitarian Universalist Association's "Fulfilling the Promise" program. They used it as a way to prepare for an upcoming capital campaign and, more important, to articulate the core premises of their community in a way that would serve as an ongoing reminder of their promises to one another.

The workshop set out below is designed for a morning, afternoon, or evening. An abbreviated format could be held as part of the congregation's worship service. If you choose to use this process as part of worship, you must pay careful attention to how visitors (especially first-time visitors) are brought into the process. One suggestion is that the visitors could decide whether to participate or meet separately with the minister and/or other key leaders during the small group part of the process, rejoining the whole congregation when they come together.

This process could also be used with the young people in the congregation, working with them in their classes. The results of the children's covenant could be shared with the adults as part of an intergenerational worship or other celebration.

Make sure that you have advertised the program well in advance, and consider having multiple sessions at various times and on different days. Pay attention to hospitality, and make sure that you provide index cards, pens, and pencils for the participants to use during the process.

Step 1. Begin with chalice lighting; reading; and some reflections on covenant, relationships, and commitment. As part of the brief service, explain the nature of a covenant: that it involves the promises that people make in mutual responsibility and agreement. Make sure you also point out that there will be times when we fail to live up to those promises, but that the nature of covenant means that we grant one another the right and responsibility to call us back to the promises we have made. You may also want to mention that the promises we make and the promises that we want others to make to us are inseparably bound together—one and the same thing. If the congregation has a historic covenant, share that covenant as part of the beginning worship.

Step 2. Ask people to recall, silently, a time in their life when a relationship with an individual or group was especially important to them. After a couple of minutes for reflection and thought, ask people to form groups of three. Each person then briefly tells the story of why this relationship was important, and what qualities in the relationship made it so. Allow about fifteen minutes for this process.

**Tip:** If doing this exercise as part of a worship service, omit the sharing with others, and ask them to proceed directly from the personal recollection to the next step.

Step 3. Based on the stories they told and heard, ask each person to write down three promises they want to make to the congregation and its members, as well as three promises they want the congregation and its members to make to them. Allow five minutes for this step.

Step 4. Ask people to pair up with someone they don't know very well, and to share the promises they want to make and the promises they want others to make. Ask each pair to create a draft covenant statement based on these promises, beginning "We covenant . . . ." Allow ten minutes for this activity.

**Tip:** If this workshop is held as part of worship, invite each pair to share their draft covenants. Inform the members that their draft statements will be given to the team or task force leading the process, and that a new draft combining their statements will be presented to the congregation for further discussion. Conclude worship with prayer, meditation, and song. Continue the process another time, beginning with Step 7.

Step 5. Ask each pair of people to join up with another pair of people to share their statements with each other and to come up with a new draft covenant statement that incorporates the ideas presented by both teams. Allow twenty minutes for this step.

Step 6. Ask the quartet to find another quartet, share their draft covenant statements, and then, once again, create a new draft covenant statement using a consensus process. (For an example of a consensus process see page 86, Appendix H, "Consensus Models," Other processes can be accessed as described in Appendix H.) Once the draft is complete, they should write their draft covenant statement on newsprint and post it. Allow thirty minutes for this process.

Step 7. Bring the participants back together. Each group of eight should share its draft covenant statement with the whole group. Once all the groups have shared, ask for similarities and differences between the statements.

Step 8. Designate a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take all the statements from the groups of four and develop a draft covenant statement that incorporates all the others for presentation to the congregation.

Step 9. End the workshop with closing words, highlighting the values that have been mentioned in the draft covenants.

Step 10. After the task group or team has prepared the revised draft covenant, hold a town hall–style meeting or various sharing opportunities for the task group or team to receive feedback. Once the sessions have been completed, the task group or team revises the draft covenant to present to the congregation at a congregational meeting for adoption.

Refer to the section “Criteria for a Good Covenant Statement,” page 58, which follows the sample processes for covenant statements.

## Sample Covenant Process 2: Hopes and Promises

This process, as adapted from a process presented at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Luis Obispo County, California, is designed to develop consensus about the primary commitments the people in the congregation want to make to one another as members. It first asks about the general subject areas for hopes and promises and then develops some specificity about those subject areas.

This workshop can be held in a morning, afternoon, or evening. Although it could be held in multiple settings at different times, there are benefits to having people together to hear one another's responses and hopes and dreams. Attention to hospitality is useful and includes advance notice, child care, and children's programming. An opportunity for social time also will help. You will need to provide participants with index cards or other paper to write on, as well as pens and pencils, and newsprint and markers for the small groups. You may begin the workshop with readings and chalice lighting.

Step 1. Tell the participants that this first exercise is to help determine the subject areas for hopes and promises—the areas of life in which they want to make and hear promises from members of the congregation. Examples might be physical behavior, communication, financial commitment, and volunteering. Ask the participants to spend three minutes answering the question, What do we want to have hopes and promises about? Ask them to write down their answers.

Step 2. Break into groups of four or five people, and have each person share his or her list. Then have each group come to consensus about the most important areas that need to be covered. Ask them to write the consensus list on newsprint and to choose one person to present the list to the larger group. Allow about fifteen minutes for this activity.

Step 3. Each small group reports its list of most important areas while the facilitator compiles a list of all the most important topics. Participants discuss the common ideas, and the facilitator leads the participants in developing a list of the most important areas to be included. The most important topics should be written on newsprint and posted. Care should be taken to ensure that the "lesser most important" topics are referred to the board for consideration at a later time.

**Tip:** Determining the most important areas can be done by providing each participant with three or four colored sticker dots and having participants "vote" for their most important topics.

Step 4. The facilitator then prompts the participants to answer the question, What have we neglected? As the participants discuss this question and possibly add to the

list, the facilitator should be making sure that the views and issues that concern historically marginalized people (such as people of color, gay men, and lesbians) are considered.

Step 5. Following the restatement of the areas of concern, the facilitator asks people to choose which of the areas they would like to work on the most. Divide people into small groups, with each group devoted to a different aspect of the hopes and promises.

Step 6. In small groups, individuals write examples of the hopes they would propose the congregation adopt for their small group's subject area. They should focus immediately on the fundamentals, not the particulars—what should be promised, rather than how the promise should be specifically fulfilled. After allowing three minutes for this, each group then shares its hopes with all the other groups reassembled.

Step 7. Each small group should come to consensus about which hopes it wishes to recommend to the congregation, writing them on newsprint.

Step 8. Each small group reports its list to the whole group, while the facilitator helps the group spot overlaps, inconsistencies, and other matters that might need to be ironed out. The participants discuss the list as needed to create an understanding of the unified list.

Step 9. Designate a task group (or the vision, mission, and covenant team) to take all the topic areas and develop a draft covenant statement that incorporates the work of the group for presentation to the congregation.

Step 10. After the task group or team has prepared the revised draft covenant, hold a town hall-style meeting or various sharing opportunities for the task group or team to receive feedback. Once the sessions have been completed, the task group or team revises the draft covenant to present to the congregation at a congregational meeting for adoption.

(Refer to the section "Criteria for a Good Covenant Statement," which follows the sample processes for covenant statements, on page 58.)

## Criteria for a Good Covenant Statement

In creating your covenant statement, it is good to keep the following criteria in mind:

- The statement should not be too vague or too detailed. Simply saying “Be nice to one another” is not enough, but highlighting every possible behavior or “fall from grace” should be avoided as well.
- Using affirmative language rather than negative language makes it easier for the congregation to feel supportive and to join in. Using we will rather than we will not also leads toward a statement that is more suited to occasional use in worship and other celebratory services.
- The covenant should be faithful to both the vision and mission of the congregation.
- The covenant should be appropriate to this particular congregation and be realistic in terms of the congregation’s context.
- Consider including in the covenant an understanding that people are fallible and that there will be times when individuals fall short of the mark. This recognition, along with an included assumption of goodwill, can be helpful during the hard times in congregational life.
- Ensure that your congregation’s covenant statement complements both the theological understanding of the membership and the principles of Unitarian Universalism.

## Following Through

Although it is important to have vision, mission, and covenant statements, even more important is making these statements come to life. Very few things are more frustrating for groups of people than to see their hard work of creating something together be relegated to the shelf on rolls and rolls of marked-up newsprint, without any mention being made of them again. To be worth the effort, we must make these statements real in the congregation's life.

**Tip:** Appendix K, "Uses of Vision, Mission, and Covenant Statements in Congregational Life," page 93, contains suggestions of how you might make the vision, mission, and covenant statements become real within your congregation.

When done well, the vision, mission, and covenant process captures the people's sense of who they are and who they want to be as a religious community. It is the clearest articulation of why the people think the congregation should exist, and the results can help the congregation in all areas of its decision making. Where should we build our new building? The answer can be found in the congregation's vision. Where should we put our money? And why should we even bother to donate money to the congregation? The answer, you can say, is found in the mission—this is what we have said is most important, so therefore we should focus our money, time, and effort where we said we wanted them to go. How should we treat one another in committee meetings, social gatherings, and the children's time? Once again, the answer can be found in one of the statements you've created—this time the covenant statement. Over and over again, the work and life of the congregation can be tested against the collective will and desire by reference back to the vision, mission, and covenant statements. The reason why most vision, mission, and covenant statements fail is because the congregation fails to plan for their effective implementation.

The good news at this point is that the follow-through on the vision statement has already been done. By creating the mission and covenant statements, a congregation has taken the steps that are necessary to work toward the vision. By having a mission that embodies the vision, and by working to make that mission come true, the vision will become a bit closer every day. By living out the covenant and treating one another in the way you've designed and spoken of, that vision comes closer. The vision becomes real through your mission and covenant work. It is a good idea to have a celebration—be it a party, special worship service, or volunteer recognition—of all the hard work that the congregation has done to get to

this point. Once the celebration is over, cross this one task off your list, and now move on to making the mission become real.

## **Mission Objectives**

Mission objectives are based on the congregation's mission statement. The mission statement identifies who you are and what you are about, but it does not explain how this will come about or be implemented. It is the mission objectives that clarify how the mission statement is to be implemented over time.

To be a successful tool, mission objectives must be SMART, an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. Also, a congregation should limit itself to three or four (but absolutely no more than five) objectives at any given time. Any more than this, and the congregation's energies are too diffused; the overriding sense of mission will disappear in the confusion of deciding what comes first.

Mission objectives usually span a five-year period. Once these objectives have been chosen, it generally takes up to a year for the governing board, committee, or relevant task force to develop a complete strategy and budget for implementing them. A phased implementation can then be spread over the next two to four years, allowing for depth of commitment and reducing the possibility of burnout. The congregation can measure the fulfillment of its objectives year by year and celebrate the successes.

**Tip:** To stimulate commitment to the objectives in both new and continuing members, some congregations choose to stagger the process by choosing a new objective every year as they complete and "retire" another. This means that in any one year, the congregation is choosing one objective; determining the strategy of another (the previous year's chosen one); working on the implementation of the objectives from year one, two, and three (the objectives chosen two, three, and four years prior); and completing the work on the objective chosen five years previously. This way, new members are involved in beginning another objective, which captures their imagination and commitment. Otherwise, they would have to wait three to five years before choosing objectives again.

Mission objectives do not curtail the ongoing services of the congregation or staff. Worship, religious education, pastoral care, and other parts of the ministry continue. However, they might continue within a different context; they might be challenged to reorient their programs to help the congregation fulfill its mission. Once each of the objectives is chosen, every committee and group in the congregation should be charged with how they will help implement the objective. Budgets may shift to support the objectives, and staff priorities and time might need to be renegotiated. Some congregations will modify their structures, staffing, and programs in concert with the new mission statement and objectives.

To avoid frightening participants, talking about, and understanding the implications of, creating mission objectives should be part of the overall conversation and process. Individuals leading the process should ask others how the objectives they choose will affect the current focus of the congregation. Chances are, the new mission and objectives will build on aspects of the congregation's life, or it will be easy to see that the priorities have shifted. Care must be taken, though, not just to add on tasks for the staff and volunteers, but to talk about what will be let go from the work and focus of the congregation so that the jobs are still manageable. Care must be taken, too, to honor the work that has been done in the past. Then, if projects and emphasis shift, those who worked hard to create them do not feel that the work they did was in vain. Celebrate the good work of the past as you move on to the work of the future, and remember that for some individuals, the move to new objectives and focus might involve grief and loss. By honoring the past and those who made it come alive, you will have better success in the change process as the congregation moves into its future vision and mission.

### **Sample Mission Objective Process**

After the mission statement has been adopted, select another weekend to establish mission objectives. This process generally takes six to seven hours, including time for lunch and breaks. The involvement of a large portion of the congregation is encouraged, so ensure that there is adequate notice and appropriate child care and children's activities. The older youth may wish to be involved in the process, and a special invitation should be made to them. You will need tables and chairs, easels, newsprint, markers, and masking tape. Paper, pens, and pencils for all participants should be made available, as well as three different colors of sticker dots—two sets for every participant. You may choose to begin the process with chalice lighting and reading or other worship elements.

Step 1. Review the mission statement, and explain the need for mission objectives and their five-year status. Describe the phases accorded by this status (acceptance, strategy development, and then three to four years of implementation). Emphasize that the objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, time bound, and realistic. For example, "a more nurturing congregation" fails to meet the first three

criteria. You may also wish to provide some information on consensus decision making for the group process to follow, as given in Appendix H, "Consensus Models," page 86.

Step 2. Ask each person to list the five most important things that the congregation must do in the next five years to implement the mission statement. After they have done this, ask them to scratch two items from the list, leaving three major objectives that are absolutely essential to fulfilling the mission.

Step 3. Form groups of four, and have each person share his or her list with the group. After that, the group needs to come up with a new list of three to five objectives on which it can agree. Encourage the group to use consensus techniques to reach its decision.

Step 4. After the groups of four have established their list of objectives, have each of these groups merge with another group (or possibly two groups, depending upon the number of people in attendance). These groups of eight or twelve people share the lists that were developed in the groups of four, and then devise a new list of three to five objectives upon which they can all agree. Again, consensus techniques can be used in this phase of the process.

Step 5. Each group then presents its objectives to the reassembled participants. Many similar objectives can be merged; this task is probably one of the most difficult ones the facilitator faces, as people may be concerned that their objective is being too radically changed or subsumed in another objective. Reach consensus with the group on the combination of objectives. The entire group may come up with eight to fifteen different objectives. Write these objectives on newsprint, putting only one or two per page in order to facilitate the process of voting in the next step.

Step 6. Once the master list has been compiled, give everyone one strip of three different colored dots. Assign weights to the dots; for example, the gold dot is worth three points; silver, two points; and blue, one point. Ask the participants then to vote for their top three objectives. Remind them to vote for three different objectives, and not to put all of their dots on one objective.

**Tip:** It may be helpful to write up the point value of the dots on newsprint and post it in a visible place to help people remember which of the dots has the highest value.

**Tip:** If you are choosing one objective per year, follow this same process, but give individuals only one dot to place. Alternatively, they could award a gold dot to the first year's objective, a silver dot to the second year's, and so on.

Step 7. After everyone has voted, tabulate the scores. In most congregations, the top two or three objectives will be very distinct. In some, three or four objectives will be clearly differentiated from the remainder. In contrast, the value of objectives four, five, six or more may not be very different. Again, it is important to select three or four, but no more than five, objectives. Resist adopting them all, since the purpose of the objectives is to help the congregation focus its leadership, resources, time, and money to make the mission effective. Diluting the objectives reduces the impact. If the vote is unclear, you may wish to eliminate the objectives with the lowest number of points and then have members vote again, with three or perhaps only two dots.

Step 8. Once the mission objectives have been decided, the next step is to refer them to a task force (or forces) to develop a plan for implementing each objective over time.

It then becomes the responsibility of the task force or forces to prepare the plan and present it to the governing board for approval and presentation to the congregation. Again, this step will take time—as much as a year—to obtain the necessary information and create an effective plan. The task force should be open to input from the congregation and seek out expert advice (from within the congregation and from outside people) to aid in their implementation plan. The task force may find that collaborating with other groups is another viable option for carrying out the mission objective.

Again, it is important to celebrate the various milestones in the process, including the implementation process. Have a potluck lunch or supper or a dessert party to celebrate what you have done to live out the mission, as well as to congratulate one another on working well on the process. Celebration is always a good way to make the vision, mission, and covenant come alive in the congregation.

## Mission Budgeting

Another important way to make the vision and mission of the congregation come alive is by tying the budget of the congregation directly to the mission. There are three types of congregational budgets: the cost, or line-item, budget; the program budget; and the mission budget. Most congregations use a cost, or line-item, budget, which focuses on past performance, reasonable projected increases in expenses, and projected income. This is the least compelling type of budget, because it focuses on what it costs to keep the congregation up and running. It is usually used at canvass time to entice people to give what is needed to keep the doors open and the lights on. A line-item budget is a necessary part of congregational life, but it is not the only way in which the budget can be conceived or presented.

A program budget focuses on the institutional welfare of the organization. The general categories from the line-item budget are allocated to each of the program areas based on a percentage of time or usage. For example, the minister's salary would be spread out over the different programs based on the percentage of time the minister spends with each program, such as worship, pastoral care, social justice, and adult religious education. This type of budget helps members understand that the money they give is not just for the intangibles of heat and light and books and staff, but that these expenses can be directly tied to the programs in the congregation that the members value. A program budget may also create a sense of competitiveness among the champions of particular program areas.

The mission budget focuses on the people helping or being helped in making the mission of the congregation come alive. It takes the program budget one step further as it relates these program areas to the mission objectives of the congregation. A mission budget is often a two-year budget, updated annually. This budget requires that the church have not only a mission statement but also a clear sense of mission, and it is particularly helpful if the congregation also has a strategic plan. This kind of budget is often the most exciting to members, and therefore the easiest to fund. They see that the money they give goes to support (either directly or indirectly) the mission and mission objectives that they have chosen. It is a very concrete way of making the mission statement come alive in the congregation. A sample process for creating a mission budget can be found in Appendix L, "Stages of a Mission Budget Process," page 94.

**Tip:** Budgets with a Mission, by Jerald King, is a good resource for learning more about how to develop a mission budget. Refer to the Resources List at the end of this document, page 96.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is an important part of each phase of the process of developing vision, mission, and covenant statements, as well as in moving them along to become living aspects of the congregation's life. Without looking at what you've done and how you've done it, you won't know how to improve the process either in the moment or for the next time the congregation goes through the cycle of vision, mission, and covenant work.

Ensure that there are formal evaluations for each process that you undertake with the congregation. Evaluations can be as simple as asking participants to respond to these questions:

- What will you take away with you today?
- What was the best part of the process?
- Which was the least valuable part of the process?
- What did you want more of?
- What can we do to improve the process?

By creating a form that features these questions and asking for feedback (and graciously accepting it!), you will help live out the covenant of right relations. You also will prove to the congregation that this is a collaborative event, rather than a mandate that others have put on them.

It is also important to keep asking who is at the table, and who is not. Through the Unitarian Universalist Association's commitment to antiracism, anti-oppression, and multicultural work, the following questions always must be asked:

- Whose voices are present and have been heard?
- Who has not been heard?
- Have the events (steps in the process) shown an understanding of the need to incorporate people of varying backgrounds, cultures, races, ages, abilities, colors, genders, sexual orientations, and gender identities, as well as people from other historically marginalized groups?
- How can we make sure that our congregation, its vision, mission, and covenant, and its processes are open to those who have been historically marginalized so they may enjoy participation, representation, and being heard?

Even if becoming an antiracist, antioppressive, multicultural institution is not one of your key objectives, these questions are still important to a spiritual and theological understanding of what it means to value and honor people, and to make alive the first principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association: affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

## **Revisiting the Vision, Mission, and Covenant**

One of the things that is true of vision, mission, and covenant work is that you are never done. Not only do you keep on adding appropriate mission objectives to help make the mission come alive, and not only do you encourage people to live out the covenant between you, and not only do you educate visitors and new members about the vision, mission, and covenant statements; you also need to revisit these documents on a regular basis to ensure that they are still what you intend. Because of the mobility of people and the influx of new members in the congregation, often after five to ten years, the proportion of the membership that was involved with the process will have dwindled to the point where fewer and fewer people have direct ownership of the process and the statements that were created. This is especially true in times of rapid congregational growth and often during times of ministerial transition—at these times, more and more people come in inheriting the good work of the longer-term members. Also, demographic and other social changes in society and the neighborhood in which the congregation is located may also foster the need for revisiting the documents.

The good news is that it is often easier to sell the process of vision, mission, and covenant after the congregation has been through the process once before. Rather than the response of “We’ve never done it like this before,” you are more likely to hear, “Oh yes, I remember this” and “Yes, this is the way we do things around here.” These reactions will be more likely if the implementation of the process has been handled well and has been kept a vibrant part of congregational life.

Given the transitory nature of congregations and the rapid pace of change in society in general, it is recommended that the congregation revisit its vision, mission, and covenant every five years. This schedule allows the newer people to buy in to the process, and it provides an opportunity to reengage and energize individuals who were present the last time the statements were reviewed. Congregations that choose the four- or five-year process of mission objectives will find that it is a natural follow-up of implementation to revisit the initial vision, mission, and covenant statements after the set of mission objectives has been completed. Congregations that add a new mission objective every year may find it somewhat awkward to revisit the vision and mission while also beginning to implement new objectives, but it can still be done. Chances are high that the most recently added objective is in line with where the congregation members want to go, even as it may be a little on the edge of the older articulated mission statement.

Planning for a subsequent process is often easier, especially if good notes were preserved from the first time the congregation went through the process. The vision, mission, and covenant team can incorporate the feedback from the last time, look at different options for some of the exercises, and create the plan in a shorter time. By now the leadership of the congregation should be committed to the process, but a “refresher” for those new in leadership is always a good idea. Again,

though, by building on the past successful experience, it should be easier to “sell” the idea. After all, what you are selling is a congregation that is vibrantly alive and connected with, and committed to, the community both within and without the congregation’s walls.

## Glossary

**Covenant:** A statement of how the members of the congregation will interact with one another, as well as what is promised, or vowed, by one member to another and to the congregation as a whole.

**Mission:** A concise statement of what the congregation wants to be known for, or known as, within the wider world; what the congregation wants to mean to the community.

**Paradigm:** A set of rules and regulations, written or unwritten, that establishes or defines conceptual and behavioral boundaries and that tells one how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful. Adam Smith, in *Powers of the Mind*, states that a paradigm is “a shared set of assumptions. The paradigm is the way we perceive the world; water to the fish. The paradigm explains the world to us and helps us to predict its behavior.” (quoted in *Paradigms: the Business of Discovering the Future*, by Joel Arthur Baker, page 31). Refer to the Resources list, page 96 of this document.

**Vision:** A carefully defined picture of where the congregation wants to be in five or more years; the dream of what the congregation can become.

## Appendixes

### Appendix A Sample Vision Statements

Together in beloved community, we will build a world without borders where all are valued and supported as they navigate their individual religious journeys.

Source unknown

We envision members and friends of First Church as pilgrims traveling on life's journey together—creating a shared ministry through which we can grow our souls in ways truthful to ourselves, caring of others, and sustaining the planet.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, San Diego, California

First Parish in Needham strives to be a vibrant, open, inclusive congregation in which all are free to explore and grow spiritually and intellectually in a supportive and socially responsible community. Through: inspirational worship services including music and celebrations; religious education opportunities for all ages; social action outreach; opportunities for reflection; intergenerational activities; social events.

First Parish in Needham (Unitarian Universalist), Needham, Massachusetts

## Appendix B

### Sample Mission Statements

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Myers, where religion and reason meet, takes as its mission:

- To nurture the search for truth and meaning
- To be a loving, diverse and intergenerational community
- To minister to each other and the community at large
- To improve the quality of life by living our values and working for local and universal justice.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Myers, Fort Myers, Florida

As a welcoming and accepting, diverse and inquiring religious community, we unite to provide an environment which stimulates a free exchange and exploration of ideas, fosters spiritual and intellectual growth, and serves as a base for active outreach to benefit the world around us.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi, Texas

We are an open and nurturing spiritual community, gathering in love for renewal, learning, and celebration. We are reaching out and living our commitment to social justice and a sustainable environment.

Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Glen Allen, Virginia

Church of the Open Door is a sacred assembly of Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and heterosexual sisters, brothers, lovers, friends, and allies gathering at the invitation of Christ to seek justice, to extend hospitality, to deepen understanding and wisdom, to affirm our identities, to receive healing and power, and to celebrate the transforming presence of the living God.

Church of the Open Door, Chicago, Illinois

The purpose of our religious community is to support each other in our various inward journeys toward truth. We will endeavor to do this in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance, openness and friendship. Committed social action on behalf of the local and global communities will be a natural expression of this purpose.

Harrisonburg Unitarian Universalists, Harrisonburg, Virginia

It is the mission of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego to become an increasingly diverse community with differing beliefs yet shared values. In joy and mutual support we offer spiritual nourishment, create beauty, affirm the worth of each individual, and honor the democratic process. From this place we encourage all ages to learn and grow together while we labor for compassionate justice in our society and on our planet.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, San Diego, California

The Dublin Unitarian Universalist Church is a sharing, nurturing and caring community which promotes spiritual growth and development along with intellectual freedom. We provide an atmosphere of acceptance of one another while seeking to understand ourselves and our universe. We foster an ethical basis for living and celebrate in life's diversity. We reaffirm our respect for others which empowers us to act on our beliefs to improve our community and relieve social injustice.

Dublin Unitarian Universalist Church, Dublin, Ohio

Our mission is to be an inclusive spiritual community that serves all families and individuals as a sanctuary, a beacon of enlightenment and a call to service.

West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Cleveland, Ohio

## Appendix C

### Sample Covenant Statements

We will be kind to each other, treat people fairly and with respect. That's how we want people to treat us, no matter how old we are.

Children's Covenant, Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California

We covenant to share our passion, energy and resources, promising honest communication and our enthusiastic presence. We promise to accept and challenge each other to live according to our principles, moving from inner conviction to collective and individual action. We recognize and embrace the conflict inherent in this process as an opportunity for positive change and growth.

Working Group Covenant A, Second Unitarian Universalist Church, Chicago, Illinois

We covenant to consciously choose to join and stay in community, to be an exceptional place where people of all ages are supported in being forces for good citizenship in the communities of our lives. We recognize that our spiritual growth happens both as individuals and in community. We are supported with an offering of stepping stones and encouragement on our lifelong journeys. Inherent in our being together in community is the awareness and celebration of our diversity—and even in the facing of our differences we unite around the core human need to have the opportunity to love and be loved.

Working Group Covenant B, Second Unitarian Universalist Church, Chicago, Illinois

We covenant to build a community that challenges us to grow and empowers us to hold faithful to the truth within ourselves, living out the profound connections that bind each of us and all beings together. We will be generous with our gifts and open in hearts and minds, seeking to recognize and accept each other in all our complexity and diversity.

Working Group Covenant C, Second Unitarian Universalist Church, Chicago, Illinois

This religious community holds dear the values of social justice, love, diversity, elevation of the human spirit, and community. We covenant to: value diversity in all interactions; create a respectful, loving community; and work for social justice in the world.

Source unknown

This church is an intentionally diverse democratic religious association, dedicated to building a dynamic faith and attitude wherein our religious heritage finds ennobling harmony with contemporary truth as validated by reason and experience. We seek the spiritual enrichment of our members in a mutually sustaining fellowship, and the welfare of all people.

To these ends we foster free inquiry with the right to make up one's own mind on religious beliefs; respect for the individual with a willingness to listen to each other's opinions and viewpoints; and consideration and respect for minority positions while practicing the democratic process in human relations.

We recognize our responsibilities as a church to help our members fulfill in their lives their religious faith and personal ethic and to develop a sustaining confidence in the meaning and purpose of life. We recognize love as a creative and supportive force in life, and we realize the interdependence and unity of all life. We seek cooperation with other organizations having similar aspirations.

Bond of Union, First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, San Diego, California

## Appendix D

### Team Retreat Suggestions

The team retreat is a time for the members of the team to get to know one another and figure out how to work well together. The team will be doing difficult work in the congregation, first by planning and then by leading the congregation through the change process. The team members need to know the dynamics of change management, when to be facilitative leaders, and when to act as change agents. They need to know their various skills and abilities. The retreat is a time to do that.

**Tip:** The goals and process of the retreat are adapted from the retreat process for a congregation's ministerial search committees. If you have recently been through the ministerial search process, you might find that a member of the search committee can add valuable information about the benefits and goals of a team retreat.

It is recommended that the team members bring in a facilitator to help them through the tasks of the retreat. This person could be a member of the congregation or a neighboring congregation, a member of the district staff or district consultant's bureau, or someone from a local social service agency. The retreat facilitator should be aided in understanding the goals of the retreat. The major goals are as follows:

1. Get better acquainted, and deeply acquainted. You will be on a long journey together.
2. Build trust. There will be issues, principles, processes, people, and anxiety around you, and you may disagree—sometimes intensely. You need to develop the trust and mutual understanding among you that are essential to following through with the process in a healthy way.
3. Learn about one another's skills and interests so you can begin to divide up the tasks ahead.
4. Build a covenant on how you will do the work together, including how to communicate with one another, deal with deadlines, and other important tasks.
5. Develop a time line for the vision, mission, and covenant process.
6. Develop your bases for making decisions. Using a consensus process is to be hoped for, but having a backup procedure is wise. Gather information on processes to enable good choices to be made. Under what circumstances will you vote? By what plurality must decisions be made? How will you deal with disagreements? When do you need to have unity in the process?
7. Develop your plan for communicating with the governing board and the congregation. How will you include key leaders and staff in the process?

## Appendix E

### Facilitative Leadership

The following facilitative practices and errors to avoid are adapted from the work of Alban Institute consultant Alice Mann, as presented in the Unitarian Universalist Association's Planning for Growth and Vitality Weekend Workshop for the Small Congregation.

- Do:** Conduct extensive, open dialogue to determine whether the vision, mission, and covenant work is indeed desired. Engaging a third party to help may strengthen the process.

**Don't:** Assume that everyone wants the congregation to move in this direction. Instead, engage the members in conversation, and ask for help in crafting the best plan.
- Do:** Ask difficult questions about what is changing. Encourage others to question.

**Don't:** Provide only technical solutions, since change involves adaptive change, and it is very personal.
- Do:** Alert the leadership and congregation that the road ahead will be difficult at times. Inform them that the transition requires personal changes from everyone.

**Don't:** Focus only on changing structural elements. Vision, mission, and covenant work is about a new way of being and a new approach. Changing only the structure bypasses the central purpose.
- Do:** Allow people to experience the discomfort required during times of transition. Resist the temptation to make everything all right again and to smooth over conflicts. Bring out the difficulties that are occurring for open discussion.

**Don't:** Jump in too quickly to reassure people in the face of the challenge. That action rescues them from the adaptive work necessary for success.
- Do:** Create diverse groups for conversations about the personal nature of change. Help these groups to understand what is necessary for congregational growth and change. By creating multiple opportunities in diverse gatherings, you offer individuals the chance to hear voices that they don't always hear.

**Don't:** Offer one-way communication (such as newsletter articles) as the primary means of communication. Engagement of individuals through open dialogue is the best way to move the process along and gain buy-in.

6. **Do:** Help people examine the roles and processes that are changing. Encourage them to articulate the required changes—in themselves and others, and in how the congregation will interact and function with the vision, mission, and covenant process.

**Don't:** Create new structures or processes too quickly. You need to have buy-in for the process to work, and moving too quickly or in a group that is too small means that you will inadvertently leave too many people outside the process.

7. **Do:** Allow the norms of the congregation to be examined and challenged. Too often congregations continue with what they've always done, and inertia and fears stop them from moving ahead. By questioning what has always been, new possibilities can emerge.

**Don't:** Hold fast to tradition and familiar rituals just because this is who you are. Make sure that you make a positive choice for the future, especially if the choice is to continue as in the past.

## Appendix F

### Additional Resources for Small Group Work

In addition to the ideas presented in the text, here are some other possibilities for engaging the membership in vision, mission, and covenant work. These ideas can work in congregations of any size, and they may be particularly helpful in larger congregations as ways to bring people together in smaller sessions to focus on the issues. There are benefits in gathering people together in new ways; when members tend to socialize primarily with the same people, they may not be aware of the diversity that exists in the congregation as a whole. Mixing and matching can provide a new kind of cross-fertilization and understanding. Pay attention, though, to the group dynamics; some people may need to be in groups that they perceive as similar to them to feel empowered to speak out. Providing a number of different ways to gather, share, and report back to one another deepens the conversation.

**Small Group Pilgrimages.** Small group pilgrimages allow people to gather and listen to one another's religious pilgrimages. Allow each person in the group a chance to talk about her or his own religious orientation, upbringing, and values. By encouraging active listening rather than one-upmanship, the participants can more easily hear the values and diversity that others bring to the congregation.

**Values Clarification.** Provide participants index cards, and ask them to respond to the following: "Name a religious value that is important to you that is affirmed by this congregation." Values could include such things as peace, justice, honesty, liberty, faith, love, kindness, persistence, and so on. Go around the group, and ask each person to name the value and explain its importance. You may also consider having people answer a second question: "Name a religious value that is important to you that is not currently affirmed by this congregation." Again, this should be a time for active listening rather than debate. When everyone has had a chance, look for common values, themes, and ideas, as well as those things that people feel are missing or could be done better. This session could close with a brief service during which the values would be written down, placed in a common container, and affirmed by the entire group.

**Building the Vision, Mission, and Covenant.** This session provides the opportunity to physically build the vision, mission, and covenant by using visual material as a learning strategy. The results can then be displayed for others to see. Some examples follow:

- Make a "tree of values." Have people list their most important value on a piece of paper or cardboard, and build a common tree from these pieces. Values could include such things as peace, justice, honesty, liberty, faith, love, kindness, persistence, and so on.

- Place a vision, mission, and covenant bowl in the meeting house. Ask people to bring objects, thoughts, or whatever symbols express their values, and place them in the bowl. Over time, begin to collect the results, and write them up or display them for use in a special celebration.
- Make a banner or collage that represents the group's understanding of the vision, mission, and covenant. If each small group does so, these banners can be brought together for a celebration at the conclusion of the overall process.
- Ask people to make a clay representation of what they mean by vision, mission, and covenant. Ask people to share their models.
- Group people together to create collages that represent the vision, mission, and covenant with used magazines and other art supplies. Display these collages, perhaps along with written explanations if the deeper meanings aren't immediately accessible.
- Gather people to act out, model, or stage the vision, mission, and covenant to make them come alive in reality. This allows for people who learn best by movement to be engaged in the process.
- Enlist the aid of artists, poets, musicians, and others to give creative expression to the vision, mission, and covenant. Someone might write new words to a hymn, compose a song, write a poem, or make a painting. All of these creations can be used in celebration.
- Create a videotape of vision, mission, and covenant, perhaps using comments from the small groups, songs, poems, and so on. The videotapes can be shared with the congregation and retained for future use, such as orienting new members or recalling the process.

**Network Mapping.** Network mapping is yet another exercise that helps you understand the geographic context of the congregation—not by who is present or who surrounds it but by how the congregation fits into the routines of work, leisure, and consumption of the members. Most people, when they review where they drive in a week, find that they have dominant routes between the places they go. Looking at how these individual maps overlap can reveal pictures of community relations and organizational ties that are invisible parts of your congregation. This exercise, which should take about forty-five minutes, is adapted from *Studying Congregations: a New Handbook*, (refer to Resources list page 96). More details on this process can be found in that volume. A simplified version of the process follows:

- Obtain several detailed maps of your city or locale, and attach them to corkboard. Gather pushpins with colored ends and yarn. You will also need several large sheets of newsprint and markers, as well as paper, pens, and pencils for every participant. Having a copy of the telephone book may be helpful in locating certain buildings.
- Divide participants into significant constituencies, such as those who live near the church, those who live in particular communities,

newcomers and long-timers, or members of ethnic groups. Have the members help you understand the various constituency groups they believe are in the congregation, and ask people to gather into these groups.

- Ask each participant to answer the following questions:
  - Where do you live?
  - Where do you work? Where do others in your household work? If you are not currently employed, where do you spend the most time during the day?
  - If you have children, where do they attend school?
  - If you have pets, where is your veterinarian?
  - Where do your parents and siblings live? Or if your parents are deceased, where are they buried?
  - Where do your two closest friends reside?
  - Where do you do your grocery shopping?
  - Where do you purchase your clothing?
  - Where are the clubs or voluntary organizations you attend? If you participate in any other groups, where do they meet? If applicable, where do you play golf, tennis, or softball; work out at a gym; or attend football, basketball, or baseball games regularly?
- After everyone has answered the questions, ask each group to choose a representative, knowing that each group will be able to add information that differs from that of their representative later.
- Next ask the members of each group to plot the various points on the map for the representative. Connect the pins, or points, to a pin at the representative's residence with lengths of yarn.
- Once completed, ask the group members how they imagine their own network might differ from their representative's map.
- After all have had a chance to share, the representatives present their maps to the whole group, adding in the points of difference that the others from their group had.
- Engage the group in conversation about what this exercise has taught the members about their congregation, the community, and their networks, and how they believe this affects their congregation's vision and mission.

## Appendix G

### Additional Background Exercises

The following exercises could be helpful in the process of either preparing for, or carrying out, vision, mission, and covenant work in the congregation. The first exercise helps people understand that this work must be experienced in the relational life of the congregation. The second exercise helps members understand the history of their congregation, and the third helps them understand how their congregation is seen (or not seen) by others in the community.

As with most of the activities in this manual, these are often best done in groups rather than alone. Being in groups gives people the chance not only to experience their own answers but also to understand how others either share or differ in their perceptions. Additionally, congregational life is all about relationships, and these exercises provide yet another way in which people can develop those relationships.

#### Exercise 1

**Intent** Since vision, mission, and covenant work is relational, it must be experienced in the life of a religious community and not just be thought about. This exercise is intended to illustrate the differences between thinking about an idea (“freedom of belief” in this exercise) and experiencing a “holy place” (such as vision, mission, and covenant).

**Using the Exercise** This exercise can be used individually, but we suggest that people share their reflections in small groups. This exercise is an excellent way to begin the vision, mission, and covenant process and to help people understand its dynamic qualities.

Step 1. Ask the participants to close their eyes and take a few moments to center themselves. Tell them that as words or pictures clutter their thinking (which is normal), they should let them go and just sit quietly.

Step 2. Ask the participants to spend a few moments thinking about the words freedom of belief. Ask them to stay with the words, and let whatever comes to mind, come.

Step 3. Now ask the participants to envision someplace that is holy for them, whether it is in a church, by a lake or stream, in the mountains, or any other place that fits their own definition of holy. Ask them to stay in that place for awhile and let whatever comes to mind, come.

Step 4. Invite the participants to return to the group, slowly opening their eyes and coming back to the present place and time.

Step 5. Ask the participants to get into small groups of three or four people. Ask them to choose a recorder, and then have them share their reflections by responding to two questions: What images, thoughts, feelings, shapes, colors, and odors came to mind when you reflected upon freedom of belief? What images, thoughts, feelings, shapes, colors, and odors came to mind when you reflected on your holy place? The recorder should note the similarities and differences between the group members in their answers, as well as the similarities and differences in the answers to the two questions.

Step 6. Ask the participants to return to the larger group, and then ask them what surprised them about the process. What did they learn? After a chance for people to reflect and respond, collect the notes from the recorders. Consider pulling together the responses and publishing the results for those members who were unable to attend the program.

## Exercise 2

**Intent** The question of identity is crucial to the formation of religious community. This exercise, based on a model developed in Handbook for Congregational Studies, (refer to resources list, page 96) provides a way to explore current congregational identity.

**Tip:** This may be a useful exercise for the vision, mission, and covenant team to use as they gather information prior to presenting the process to the congregation. By understanding the congregation's past and current identity, the team can help answer questions and clarify mistakes in historical perception.

**Using the Exercise** This exercise can be used individually or in a small group as a means of reflecting upon identity issues in one's own congregation or religious group. If done in a small group, each of the elements should be dealt with separately, with participants invited to offer their insights. Someone should write these insights on newsprint. When the list is complete, the group should discuss the findings, looking for common themes.

Various factors affect the identity of a religious community, be it a congregation, district, or special interest group. The following aspects of congregational life are most important:

- **History.** What is the history of this congregation—the stories that have helped to shape it and give it purpose? What are the community’s significant happenings? Try to locate only a few major stories.
- **Symbols.** What are the signs or symbols in the life of the congregation that provide understandings about life and reinforce the identity of the group? For example, the flaming chalice is often an important symbol. What does it mean to this congregation?
- **Rituals.** What are the repetitive actions or ceremonies that the community uses to express feelings of joy, grief, gratitude, and so on? A common affirmation or covenant or a congregational song are other examples of rituals.
- **Tradition.** What is the wider tradition to which this particular community belongs? How does your congregation relate to the wider story of Unitarian Universalism?
- **Character.** What makes this congregation different from other groups? Each congregation has something unique that sets it apart—its worship, fellowship, other event, or identity. Name that difference.
- **Demography.** What are the basic characteristics of your community, such as race, age, income, education, orientation, ethnicity, and other characteristics? Try to develop a general profile. Then try to describe the general characteristics of the community that your congregation serves. Are the characteristics of your congregation similar to or different from those of the wider community, and on what points?
- **Outlook.** What can be said of the general outlook of your congregation—its description of the way things are and the way they ought to be? There may be a general feeling that the world is unjust, for example, and needs to be reformed.

The results of this process can be written up, shared with members of the congregation, and saved for future celebrations of the history. They can also be useful when the congregation needs historical and contextual information during a search for religious leadership.

**Tip:** The results of this exercise will be helpful in understanding the paradigm of the congregation. By articulating answers to these usually silent questions, the congregation can begin to see the nature of the “water” in which they swim and move.

### Exercise 3

**Intent** This exercise is designed to help people conceptualize vision, mission, and covenant in terms of their own congregation by taking them on a guided mental tour of the facility. Vision, mission, and covenant are not simply language but also other modes of expression. Space, for example, says a lot about the vision, mission, and covenant of a congregation—about what the congregation values and where it places its resources.

**Tip:** This exercise is similar to “Sample Vision Program 1: Guided Imagery for a Group,” (see page 33), but it is focused specifically on the facilities itself rather than on the programming and feeling of the congregation or that which it may do beyond its walls. However, by looking at the physical plant alone, you can gain insights into the values it represents.

**Using the Exercise** This exercise is best used in small groups. The leader guides participants through the exercise first and then asks them to report their findings and record them on newsprint. After discussion, the leader asks participants to reflect on how the vision, mission, and covenant might be better expressed in the building itself. Because each congregation is different, with a unique vision, mission, and covenant, it is difficult to provide guidelines that will apply to every situation. If, for example, the congregation has a clear mission to serve its community, it might express that mission in terms of space as follows:

- The facility is located in the center of the community it serves.
- Signs or other external displays clearly indicate the location of the building and its identity.
- The building is accessible to people with disabilities.
- The entrance space is well-lighted, attractive, and welcoming. Information about the congregation is displayed, and there are clear directions for newcomers about what can be found in the building and where to find it.
- A schedule of events or community groups using the space is posted in a conspicuous spot.
- Symbols of community involvement (such as posters for community events or information about community groups) can be found throughout the building.
- Portions of the building have clearly been reserved for use of the community (for example, office space is provided to local community groups or a recreation hall is used by after-school programs).

**Visualization Exercise** This exercise should be read by the leader several times prior to sharing it with the group. Participants should be encouraged to find a comfortable position and then be asked to settle in, let go of other cares and concerns, and take several deep breaths to center themselves. Then, when people are settled in, the following visualization should be read:

Close your eyes for a few moments. Begin to imagine your congregation—the actual physical space or building in which your congregation is located. Try to frame a picture in your mind of the whole facility—of how it looks from a distance.

Now begin to walk up to the building. What does it look like? What feelings does the whole facility evoke? What immediately attracts your attention? How is the landscaping, the parking area, the outside of the building? Pause for a moment to note the overall impression of the building and its grounds. Does it appear warm, inviting, interesting, boring?

Start to enter by the front door. What attracts your attention? Are there stairs? Are there handrails? Can everyone get in there, whether walking, with a stroller, or in a wheelchair? Where can people with mobility problems get in the building? Does the front entrance beckon you inside?

Now tour the facility. Note whether there are signs telling you the locations of various rooms when you first enter. Look into the areas reserved for various activities, for example, religious education, the office, social activities, and parents with fussy babies. What are your immediate feelings about what happens here? Does the building welcome you, put you off, leave you warm, or leave you cold? How might someone of a different generation than yours, or from a historically marginalized group, feel about it?

Quietly enter the meeting room, sanctuary, or worship area. Sit down and look around. Look at the windows, how the seats are arranged, whether or not there are colors, what is in the space the congregation faces, what symbols are apparent, and so on. Take in the whole space. What feelings are aroused as you sit quietly? How do you feel being here? How might someone of a different generation than yours, or from a historically marginalized group, feel about it?

Gently welcome the participants back to where they actually are, and invite them to take a few moments to reflect silently on this visualization exercise in terms of what they know about vision, mission, and covenant. Ask participants to answer the following questions for themselves, jotting down notes for discussion later:

- Based on your tour of the facility, what did you learn about the vision, mission, and covenant of your congregation?

- What signs, symbols, posters, and arrangements did you discover that seemed to point to vision, mission, and covenant?
- Did your overall sense of the facility indicate to you that this is a place occupied by people who have a clear sense about who they are and a clear vision and mission?
- Does the facility give the feeling that this is a religious community that wishes to fulfill its covenant, activate its mission, and live into its vision?

After a period of silent reflection and writing, invite the participants to share their responses. A recorder should capture the themes, ideas, and answers to preserve them as a record of the proceeding and as an aid to use as the vision, mission, and covenant process continues.

## Appendix H

### Consensus Models

**Tip:** Much of the following information on consensus is taken from the Web site of First Parish in Lexington, Unitarian Universalist, Lexington, Massachusetts. The Web site can be found at [www.fplex.org/consensusintro.shtml](http://www.fplex.org/consensusintro.shtml). In addition, by searching on "consensus decision making" in an Internet search engine, those interested in consensus work can find hundreds of articles and suggestions for processes.

A consensus model is a decision-making model that empowers participants to cooperate with one another in order to reach an outcome that is in the best interest of the group as a whole and that furthers the group's stated purpose. It is a structured process that ensures that all voices are heard and yet provides for an efficient means to reach decisions. The consensus model encourages active participation by establishing a collective ownership of all proposals, concerns, and discussions. It provides for various levels of assent while still reserving the right to say no; however, that no generally is reserved for exceptional circumstances.

Consensus is not the same thing as unanimity. It is not that all participants must agree to the proposal; rather, they must agree not to stand in the way of the proposal. Consensus is reached when no participants hold strong concerns that are based on the group's stated purpose or values.

Success of a consensus process depends on several things:

- Having clearly stated the group mission and values or covenant.
- Designating certain key roles as essential for the process, the most important of these being the facilitator.
- Having the commitment of the participants to cooperate, speak in a disciplined manner, listen attentively, and show respect for the contributions of every member.

Consensus works best in an atmosphere in which conflict is encouraged, supported, and resolved cooperatively with respect, nonviolence, and creativity. Conflict is desirable, as it brings the differences in opinions and feelings to the surface; it is not something to be avoided, dismissed, diminished, or denied. Rather, conflict is something to be welcomed when handled well. When members feel as if their different opinions and feelings will be heard and taken seriously, and when there is

an agreed-upon and shared covenant of behavior, conflict can allow for creativity in resolving problems and in finding better options than would surface without it.

Consensus also needs time, but it is not inherently time-consuming. Teaching the congregation about consensus—what it is and what it is not—is helpful. As the congregation matures in its use of consensus, this way of handling decisions becomes very effective and efficient. However, commitment is required to educate, learn, and follow even when the going gets a bit touchy.

Depending upon the version of consensus being used, participants are given three or more options for their response to a proposal. In every case, the congregation will have to decide ahead of time the criteria for decision making: Will it proceed with up to a certain percentage of blocking/nay votes, or will one block/nay vote be sufficient to halt the decision? Some groups say that the “purest” form of consensus requires that a group not accept any proposal for which there is as few as one block vote, whereas other groups have found that they will use a “consensus-minus-one” format to prevent one person from stopping the group from doing what is clearly the desire of the vast majority of people. Large organizations might find that their “minus one” becomes “minus 1 percent” or some other measure as a compromise form of consensus governing. Again, it is important to remember that these decisions must be made ahead of time, and the congregation needs to be educated in the practice of consensus decision making.

Two options for the response choice range are listed below. Some groups find themselves creating their own list of options. The only requirement is that there be ways for people to indicate their less-than-wholehearted support without blocking the process.

- A three-choice option can include the following:
  - Approve. The participant feels confidence in the proposal.
  - Stand aside. The participant is willing to allow the proposal to be adopted, even though she or he has concerns or is indifferent.
  - Block. The participant believes that the content of the decision might conflict with the group’s stated purpose and shared values.
- A six-choice option can include the following:
  - Assent. The participant sees a need for the proposal and assents to it as the direction or decision that needs to be taken.
  - Go along. The participant doesn’t see the need for the decision but will go along with the group’s decision.
  - Reservation. The participant thinks there is a mistake in the decision or idea but will go along with the group’s decision.
  - Stand aside. The participant cannot agree to the decision but will not stop others from doing it.
  - Block. The participant cannot support the decision, as he or she believes it is immoral or in direct violation of the group’s purpose and

values; the participant has a dissenting opinion and is not willing to stand aside, yet does not wish to withdraw from the group.

- **Withdraw.** The participant cannot go along with the decision or idea and finds it so out of place with the group's purpose and values that should it be brought forward, he or she would have to withdraw from the group.

## Appendix I

### Leader as Change Agent and Advocate

This material is adapted from the work of John Kotter in his book *Leading Change* (see the Resources list, page 97). Although these steps are from the corporate world, they are effective in congregations and other nonprofit associations and organizations as well.

- Do:** Establish a sense of spiritual and institutional urgency by focusing on what the congregation needs to help it move forward and create the shared vision, mission, and covenant.

**Don't:** Allow too much complacency; if you do, the process will falter, perhaps not to be started again.
- Do:** Create a guiding coalition focused on vitality and change. Lone rangers don't get much lasting change work done in congregational life.

**Don't:** Fail to identify motivated leaders and educate them on what is required and how the process will unfold.
- Do:** Develop a vision that is both compelling and sensible about (1) the process and how it will proceed and (2) the benefits and value of the process to the congregation.

**Don't:** Underestimate the power of vision. It is vision that will motivate a congregation and move it along.
- Do:** Communicate the vision for the process ten times more often than you think is necessary. Major change is impossible unless the majority of the membership is willing to help. Use every vehicle possible to communicate where you are going and why.

**Don't:** Assume that everyone knows. Not everyone hears the first time or as a result of the first method, and even those who "know" need reminders to stay motivated.
- Do:** Empower broad-based action. Help congregants know that this process won't work without them.

**Don't:** Permit obstacles to block the new vision. Help people to see that the path extends beyond the walls they construct.
- Do:** Generate and celebrate short-term wins. Celebrate every statement when it is passed, and ensure that the statements remain live documents within the congregation by using them in worship and in visitor and new member orientations.

**Don't:** Fail to create and celebrate short-term wins. When you don't celebrate, people forget what they have done.

7. **Do:** Consolidate gains and produce more change. Publicize the way in which these statements are being made real, and help bring the congregation's memory back to what it has done.  
**Don't:** Declare victory too soon. Just passing the statements isn't enough; statements need to be made real.
8. **Do:** Anchor the new approaches in the culture. Make sure to clarify the connections between what the congregation chooses to do and the statements, and use the statements to make major decisions.  
**Don't:** Take for granted that people see the relationship between changes achieved and vitality and growth. Be explicit about the causes and results. Remind them that the work that they do matters, and how it matters.

## Appendix J

### Additional Questions

The following questions may be helpful for your congregation to discuss as you move into vision, mission, and covenant work. These questions can help members explore their spirituality and their sense of belonging in both the world and the congregation. The questions can be used in theological reflection, as lead-ins to any of the activities and processes set out in this manual, as stand-alone questions for discussion groups, or as topics for small group ministry sessions. They come from the Unitarian Universalist Association's "Fulfilling the Promise" program.

1. What has deeply moved you in your life? What was it in you that responded? Why were you moved? What does this imply for what this congregation might do, or for what you might offer others in the congregation?
2. Why are you here?
3. Whom or what do you serve?
4. Are you faithful?
5. If Unitarian Universalism were somehow not available, what would be missing in your life? What does that imply for what our Unitarian Universalist congregation might do better? Or for what Unitarian Universalist congregations, in association with one another, might do better?
6. What are the deepest yearnings of your heart? What does that imply for what this congregation might do better? Or for what Unitarian Universalist congregations in association might do better?
7. What is the core endeavor of our Unitarian Universalist congregation? What is the fundamental purpose or reason for being of our congregation?
8. Many religious traditions developed beliefs related to some cosmic story, such as the Jewish fall of the Temple or the Christian story of salvation. Is there a story at the core of our Unitarian Universalist faith? Do we have a fundamental story? Or is there another, more appropriate core? What about some categories from universal aesthetic experiences, such as rhythm, dance, and harmonies? What are we neglecting, or what have we scarcely named, that might be profoundly important at a fundamental level?
9. Given our congregation's core endeavor, what is the model we use for carrying out that core endeavor? Is there a better model that might be more appropriate?
10. If being together in a congregation implies some kinds of promises to one another, what are the subject areas of those promises? What promises are required in order to be a Unitarian Universalist congregation? What promises could be areas of choice for the congregation?

11. What work do we do in our congregation that involves relationships among people? How relational is our congregation, really? Do we want it to be more relational? Less relational?
12. In the light of our needs and aspirations as a congregation, how might this congregation or individuals in it benefit by association with other Unitarian Universalist congregations? What can we offer to others?

## **Appendix K**

### **Uses of Vision, Mission, and Covenant Statements in Congregational Life**

The vision, mission, and covenant statements can be incorporated into the life of the congregation in an unlimited number of ways in order to keep the statements in front of the members. The following are some suggestions:

- The governing board and committees can set short- and long-term goals as ways to live out the mission.
- The governing board and congregation can refer to the vision and mission statements when making tough decisions about the allocation of resources or choosing priorities for their efforts.
- The staff members' responsibilities can be structured so that their activities support the vision and mission.
- Vision and mission statements can be used in the annual review of both the employees' and the congregation's ministry.
- Religious education for adults and children can be structured such that classes are also the formation process for carrying out the mission.
- Vision, mission, and covenant statements can be used as part of orientation for visitors and new members.
- T-shirts, bumper stickers, and other marketing tools can be created to feature part of the vision and mission.
- The vision, mission, and covenant statements can be used in whole or in part in the congregation's liturgy, on either a regular or occasional basis.
- Budget decisions can be made with a focus on the mission.
- In an annual vision and mission celebration, the congregation's members can celebrate the congregation's purposes.
- The mission statement can be used to create a "mitzvah day"—a day of service to the community that centers around the congregation's mission to that community.

## **Appendix L**

### **Stages of a Mission Budget Process**

This material on how to create a mission budget is taken from the Planning for Growth and Vitality Weekend Workshop for the Small Congregation. More resources on fund-raising and stewardship can be found at the Unitarian Universalist Association's Web site, at [UUA.org](http://UUA.org) by going to the Leaders' Library and by searching "Fundraising."\*

Stage 1. Clarify and cultivate your overall vision for the congregation. Then create a vision of what your programs ultimately aim to contribute to your congregation and the community.

Stage 2. Determine the three to five mission objectives for the program year, and as you aim toward the future.

Stage 3. With the help of the task force charged with implementing the mission objectives, determine how the current programs will achieve these objectives, and define critical success factors. Again with help from the task force, identify new programs needed to fulfill the mission, and determine whether any existing programs will no longer be necessary.

Stage 4. Focus the mission through current and potential ministry programs by asking questions such as the following: Who will be served? What are the spiritual, relational, and personal needs to be met? What is our overall strategy? Why is this program important?

Stage 5. Determine the resources owned and needed for carrying out the mission objective, including the human, financial, spiritual, and facilities resources.

Stage 6. Develop your proposal for funding programs; be clear about whom the giving will help, who will be doing the helping, how the programs will further your congregation's vision and mission, and how the present programs and proposals prepare the way for future program goals and funding.

After the above work is done, it may be helpful to form a special study committee to look at the whole budget picture in relation to your congregation size. Once an

assessment has occurred, an overall financial strategy can be developed that includes a variety of the following elements:

- Communicating a clear vision and the key steps needed to realize that vision.
- Building a spiritual commitment to proportional giving as the basis for the annual pledge.
- Incorporating new members effectively.
- Connecting members to ministries related to their talents and gifts.
- Educating members on the spiritual practice of giving, including planned giving.

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**\*Important note for searching UUA.org:** All UUA resources mentioned are available in the Leaders section of the web site, in the Leaders' Library. Please use quotes around the title when you search to bring up the resource or item you seek.