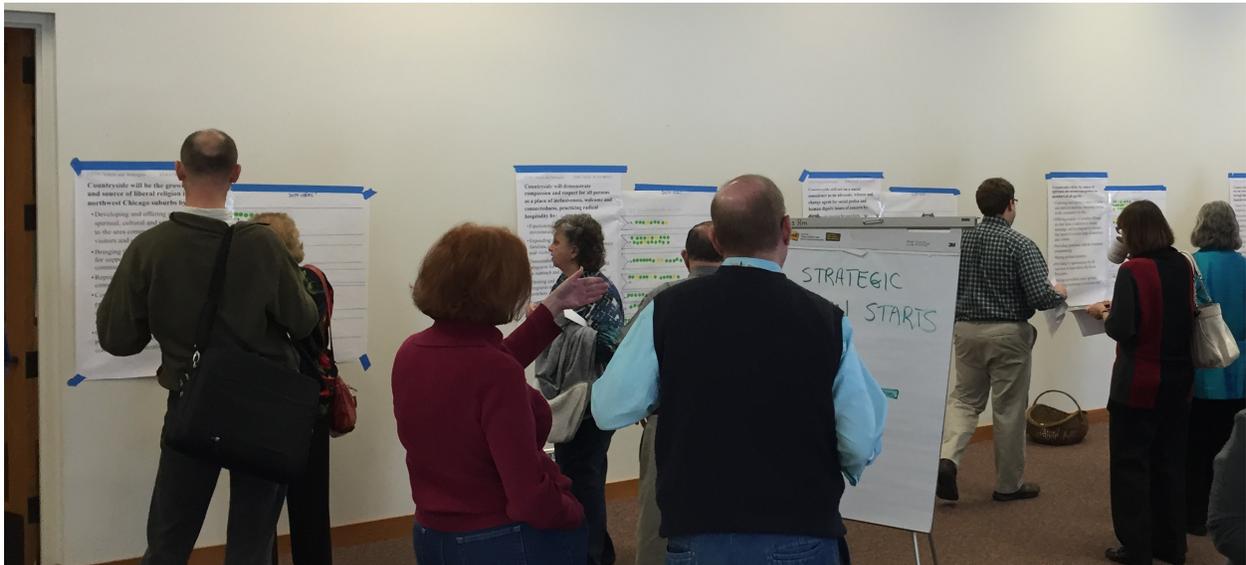


# COUNTRYSIDE CHURCH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST Congregational Strategic Plan – April 2015



## **A Message from Reverend Hilary Krivchenia**

*If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them. Henry David Thoreau*

I invite you to read this report – The next step is supporting our strategic plan with actions.

We have not built castles in the air in this strategic planning process – and the process revealed a deep yearning for service with purpose. This is a portrait of a community that wants to be dynamic, in touch with deep meaning, and engaged as a creative and healing force in the world. It is the vision of a faith community that has noble aspirations, a clear commitment to affirming the principles and values of Unitarian Universalism, and to living our covenant.

What we now must build toward, is how we set clear actions in place to support this plan. What steps must be taken to make this strategic vision of the congregation possible? We will return to the congregation in the autumn to determine the actual steps and the particular strategies to which you are ready to make commitments of time, talent, and treasure. I encourage you to participate as we explore and identify specific actions that enable us to evolve these strategies into results. And, finally, I encourage you to recognize we can only enter the world for which we yearn by helping to bring it into being. Our spirits can only be nourished by our dreams if we engage with our hands, hours, and hearts.

Our strategic planning team has worked with care and dedication, creating a process and encouraging participation by the congregation so their strategic visions would be heard and taken seriously. There was tremendous consistency of vision among those who participated and a real understanding that our faith community needs to balance our call to higher purpose, the tending of our spiritual lives, and care for our congregational home.

## **The Strategic Planning Team**

Original Strategic Planning Team ca. 2013

- Gloria Kinney, Art Paton, Peggy Simonsen, Sheryl Skifstad,
- Rev. Hilary Krivchenia as advisor

Sheryl Skifstad resigned in May 2014 to become Vice President of the Board of Trustees and to form the search committee for a new Music Director.

In fall 2014, new members Marty Farrington and Ron Vargason joined the team. In December Marcus White also joined.

Team members each brought references, sources and past experiences with strategic planning. Reverend Hilary suggested a book, “Holy Conversations” by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, which outlines approaches for strategic planning relevant to the needs of churches.

***Mission Statement Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist***  
*9/11/10 revision*

*We come together as a congregation to inspire our quests for the spiritual, ethical, and meaningful in life and to advance respect, compassion, and justice in the wider world.*

***Vision Statement***

*Countryside is the growing voice and source of liberal religion in the northwest Chicago suburbs by:*

- creating a place of inclusiveness, welcome, connectedness, compassion and respect;*
- providing for the spiritual and intellectual growth of members of all ages;*
- cultivating a vital future for our congregation and community through thoughtful stewardship of our financial resources and our environment; and,*
- acting on a social conscience*

The Countryside mission and vision statements are reproduced here for reference. Review of the new strategic plan will show strong alignment with the mission and vision long held by CCUU. This appears to indicate we are sustaining our values and principles within the details of the new strategic plan.

# CCUU Congregational Strategic Plan

## CCUU Vision and Strategies

**Countryside will establish a growing public ministry to share our liberal religion in the north-west Chicago suburbs by:**

- Developing and offering educational, spiritual, cultural and social programming to the area community as well as to visitors and our own congregation.
- Bringing the message in invitational events that this is a place for support and learning within the wider community.
- Representing UU principles in the larger community.
- Communicating our message and programs through publicity and advertising, marketing, branding, public relations, social media.
- Gaining visibility in the community, partnering with other churches and community organizations.

**Countryside will demonstrate compassion and respect for all persons as a place of inclusiveness, welcome and connectedness, practicing radical hospitality by:**

- Functioning actively as a welcoming environment.
- Expanding diversity (age, race, class, families, and sexual orientation) of members and visitors.
- Demonstrating friendliness by social programs for members and visitors as well as outreach and beyond the church doors.
- Creating and supporting multi-generational programs and events that appeal to younger members and visitors.
- Encouraging youth leadership.
- Identifying individual strengths and interests and inviting contributions.
- Expanding involvement with UUA regional, district and national resources.

**Countryside will be a transformational source of spiritual and intellectual growth for members of all ages by:**

- Exploring and sharing a variety of faiths and spiritual practices, becoming known in the community for this.
- Offering a variety of worship offerings at other times in addition to Sunday mornings, and worship service formats that appeal to a wide range of members and visitors.
- Providing intentional faith development programming.
- Sharing spiritual journeys.
- Providing opportunities for all members to learn about the Seven Principles.
- Making our website more spiritual, providing inspiration to members and visitors.

**Countryside will cultivate a vital future for our congregation and community through thoughtful stewardship of our financial and human resources by:**

- Sound fiscal management and budgeting.
- Maintaining the integrity of our building and landscape.
- Expanding the endowment fund and minister's discretionary fund.
- Identifying and nurturing new leaders.
- Hiring staff to facilitate achievement of our vision.
- Repurposing the North Property to help achieve the goals of CCUU's vision.

**Countryside will engage in a public ministry of social conscience as an advocate, witness and change agent for social justice and human dignity issues of concern by:**

- Full participation by members, including families, in social action initiatives.
- Active involvement with our outreach partners.
- Partnering with area churches, local government, and advocacy groups for community service and social action.
- Active involvement with UUA and UUSC social justice issues, even controversial ones.

**Countryside will live our affirmation of the interdependent web of life and cultivate thoughtful stewardship of a sustainable environment by:**

- Implementing carbon neutral practices.
- Educating all members to make environmentally sound personal choices.
- Expanding Countryside's influence through programs like the Climate Change Seminar, organic gardening and native plantings.
- Continuing to conduct, promote and expand visibility of our farmers' markets, fair trade fair, etc. to the community.
- Developing commitment in our youth.
- Influencing the wider community through involvement with local government, advocacy groups, other UU churches and community organizations.

## **The Need for a Strategic Plan**

In December of 2013, the CCUU Board of Trustees asked that a strategic planning team be formed to create a plan that current and future boards and ministries could use to guide key decisions about the direction of the church for the next three to five years. As the church grows and responds to both internal and external needs, a strategic plan can provide direction for the work of the congregation and its leadership.

## **What is a Strategic Plan?**

A strategic plan is generally defined as the goals and actions that guide the intended direction of the organization to ensure relevance, success and support. For CCUU, the strategic plan is a way to ensure that strategic decisions are in alignment with our Vision, Mission and Principles. It is not the intent of the strategic plan to change the Vision, Mission, or values of CCUU, but to determine and illuminate the desired future of the congregation and its leaders and identify strategies to help achieve that future.

## **Strategic Planning Process**

The Strategic Planning team discussed a variety of methods and processes to gather viewpoints from CCUU members. They planned interview questions that would generate discussion about the desired future of the church for the next 3-5 years. From April through December 2014, they conducted focus groups with ministries, staff, former board members, committees and individuals in the congregation. The team found that strategies envisioned by the groups and individuals aligned significantly with the CCUU Vision statement. Results of these interviews were categorized and collated into a summary document entitled “Strategic Visions” which was shared with the Board of Trustees and the Ministry Council early in 2015.

On March 8, 2015 the strategic plan was posted in Atherton Hall to be viewed by the congregation who were asked to indicate the items for which they personally had the strongest passion and support. The results of the congregation inputs were collected and reported to the CCUU Board and Ministry Council in mid-March so tactical planning and analysis of funding and staffing requirements could be initiated.

We should emphasize that the strategic visions and strategies represent summaries or consolidations of similar statements from many CCUU members. A few items are shown as originally stated due to their wide acceptance and nearly identical content.

The Strategic Planning team produced the final version of this Strategic Plan document in April 2015 for distribution at the CCUU Annual Meeting in May 2015.

## Next Steps

The first question that will occur to many members is, “What do we do now?” The answer is to take the next steps to define actions we can do and which actions we can afford that support the new strategic plan. Some actions may be immediate. Some actions may take place over extended time. Some actions may not begin for a couple of years. The important step is to begin.

The CCUU Ministry Council and the Board of Trustees have the responsibility to create the detailed plans for what can be done in support of the strategic plan. These steps will take into account what people, materials and funding are needed to enable the planned actions. Each ministry is likely to have actions in support of the strategic plan. Some current committee plans already support the new strategic plan. Other actions will require new resources and in some cases, new partners.

The CCUU Board and Ministry Council will share responsibility for the next steps in planning. Staff and budget will guide many planning steps and key decisions. The Board will need to provide guidance to the ministries on what can be supported. Ministries may need to prioritize actions to ensure congregational engagement and focus that will be needed to complete the actions and projects selected.

## Recommendations

A proposed activity is for each ministry to determine which strategies are appropriate for their charter, and to review the actions suggested by the congregation. Next, to define the resources needed to achieve them. By planning for time, people and funding, it will be easier to make choices and priorities, and it will be more transparent. Also, it will be easier to identify the right partners for some of the actions. Strategies with actions suggested by the congregation are provided in Appendix A for use by the ministries as a starting point for action planning.

Another proposed activity is to conduct an event in Fall 2015 with the congregation to present the priorities and anticipated projects defined by the ministries. The event will be designed to engage members of the congregation and to focus our resources on the actions with the best outcomes for our visions and strategies. The Ministry Council is designated as the team to conduct this activity. The expected outcome is to have members of the congregation aware of what is needed and committed to participate, without reservation, in the accomplishment of desired projects.

Finally, we propose creation of a mechanism that reports the work of the teams to both the congregation and the community. One of the central elements of the strategic plan calls for CCUU to be the voice of liberal religion in the northwest suburb. What better way to find our voice than to celebrate the difference we have made with the community and the CCUU membership.

## Proposed Implementation Timeline

April–May 2015	Board and Ministry Council begin initial planning for ways to implement the strategic plan
May 2015	Congregational Meeting, presentation of strategic plan and next steps
May–Oct. 2015	Ministries plan actions and determine resources needed to achieve the strategies
Oct. 2015	Congregation Engagement Event, people select which tasks and roles they want to support with clear commitment
May 2016	Initial outcomes reported to community and CCUU members New methods and practices captured and documented New partners identified, integrated and celebrated
Sept. - 2017	Delayed and deferred actions are started by increased funding and partner assistance. Key elements of the strategic plan are achieved. Reflection on outcomes and meaning to the congregation are conducted. Adjustments to actions and work made to ensure continuity, sustainable impact on the communities served by CCUU.
2017-2018	Ongoing progress reviews, renewal of commitments and partnerships

## Appendix – Visions and Strategies, with Actions suggested in 2014 by congregational participants

### **Countryside will be the growing voice and source of liberal religion in the northwest Chicago suburbs by:**

- Developing and offering educational, spiritual, cultural and social programming to the area community as well as to visitors and our own congregation
- Creating and supporting multi-generational programs and events that appeal to younger members and visitors
- Communicating our message and programs through publicity and advertising, marketing, branding, public relations, social media
- Gaining visibility in the community, partnering with other churches and community organizations

### Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Continue Fair Trade and Farmers' Markets

Publicize our outreach and auction results; publicize our community service to media after events to show what was accomplished

More adult programs on Sundays

Revive *Making the Most of Our Money*

Create programs that appeal to younger adults - members and community - music, coffee houses, etc.

Announce our services with other churches in newspapers

### **Countryside will be a place of inclusiveness, welcome and connectedness, practicing radical hospitality by:**

- Functioning actively as a welcoming environment
- Expanding diversity (age, race, class, families, and sexual orientation) of members and visitors
- Demonstrating friendliness by social programs and outreach beyond the church doors
- Offering multi-generational programs, encouraging youth leadership
- Identifying individual strengths and interests and inviting contributions
- Expanding involvement with UUA regional, district and national resources

### Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Noon dinners for seniors

Birthday party for all 80+ members

Circle Suppers for parents with children

Provide child care for evening programs and events so parents can participate

Have frequent all-congregation social activities and programs/opportunities to provide connection

Create a membership/marketing team to recruit and integrate new members into our congregation

Consider a yearbook or almanac with joys and sorrows to share as a way to build community

Family activities on site on Sundays(?)

Connect member interest info with groups to match people with issues

Publicize that CCUU welcomes a variety of faiths and spiritual practices, and helps with spiritual development

CCUU t-shirts for group events

Include older members in Religious Education to connect generations

Work on transitions - Religious Education to adults, working to retirement

Explore ways to integrate youth and adult programs

**Countryside will demonstrate compassion and respect for all persons and be a positive advocate, witness and change agent for social and human dignity issues of concern by:**

- Full participation by members, including families, in social action initiatives
- Active involvement with our outreach partners
- Partnering with area churches, local government, and advocacy groups for community service and social action
- Active involvement with UUA social justice issues, even controversial ones
- Continuing to conduct, promote and expand visibility of our farmers' markets, fair trade fair, etc. to the community
- Using the North Property as an outreach base for empowering the community

Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Reach out beyond our members to discuss difficult topics such as Ferguson, mental health facilities, etc. to show our involvement

Partner with companies to support our giving

Support local groups besides PADS and communicate our involvement to increase visibility in the community

Focus on one charity or one issue per year and make an impact in that area

Partner with *Habitat for Humanity*

Connect with other groups already doing activities in line with our beliefs

Plan multi-generational work projects to benefit others; explore ways to volunteer with family

Be the social action organizer across congregations

*Nuns on the Bus* could be an action model and provide inspiration

Time and Talent Auction is now only for people with money; invite more people to come through signing up with time commitments

**Countryside will be the center of spiritual and intellectual growth for members of all ages by:**

- Exploring and sharing a variety of faiths and spiritual practices, becoming known in the community for this
- A variety of worship offerings at other times in addition to Sunday mornings, and worship service formats that appeal to a wider range of members and visitors
- Sharing spiritual journeys in services and providing intentional faith development programming
- Providing opportunities for all members to learn about the Seven Principles
- Bringing the message that this is a place for support and learning within the wider community in invitational events; represent UU principles in the larger community
- Making our website more spiritual, providing inspiration to members and visitors

Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Create a spiritual quilt/Wellsprings

Upload Sunday services to YouTube

Collaborate with Meadville-Lombard students and help with their projects  
Bring in speakers of other faiths  
Offer Q&A religious service annually  
Describe services in each Focus  
Build Wellsprings to deepen individuals' spirituality  
Add services with appeal to young adults

**Countryside will cultivate a vital future for our congregation and community through thoughtful stewardship of our financial and human resources by:**

- Sound fiscal management and budgeting
- Maintaining the integrity of our building
- Expanding the endowment fund and minister's discretionary fund
- Identifying and nurturing new leaders
- Hiring staff to support volunteers to achieve our visions

Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Raise congregational governance awareness - we are the church  
Members achieve Aspirations of Membership - financial and participative  
Include younger, newer members in leadership and Board positions  
Build a leadership bench - identify and develop new leaders  
Create a skills bank  
Activity management - control the number of activities, involve more people and have greater focus in our efforts  
Become debt free  
Grow staff - music director, accompanist and full-time membership director  
Improve storage in our building, including cleaning up clutter in the cont room

**Countryside will cultivate thoughtful stewardship of a sustainable environment by:**

- Implementing carbon neutral practices
- Educating all members to make environmentally sound personal choices
- Expanding Countryside's influence through programs like the Climate Change Seminar
- Developing commitment in our youth
- Influencing the wider community through involvement with local government, advocacy groups, other UU churches and community organizations

Actions Suggested by Focus Groups

Continue to hold climate change seminars and other workshops  
Promote environmental spirituality  
Move kids and adults outdoors to learn and experience; include those with special needs  
Work toward CCUU becoming carbon neutral  
Install solar panels  
Educate the congregation to follow Unitarian Universalist Association guidelines regarding fossil fuel divestment  
Use only renewable energy such as solar and wind power  
Be a place to learn about environmental and other sustainability issues