

Long-Term Planning Process

Membership Committee Action Plan

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Action # 1: Greeter Program

Time Frame: Year around

- Steps:
- 1) Provide training for new greeters yearly in the fall.
 - 2) Maintain a greeter schedule to insure that at least one greeter is available for each service throughout the year.
 - 3) Maintain a Google docs listing of recent visitors from the past 6 months so that greeters are more aware of whom they should be prepared to welcome each Sunday.
 - 4) Hold periodic check-ins with greeters throughout the year to insure smooth functioning and allow for sharing of experiences and skills. This should also be done occasionally with Parish Committee members to secure their feedback .
 - 5) Maintain supply of Welcome Packets in the pews.

Priority Rating: 1

As the Membership Committee's primary mandate is to help grow the congregation both quantitatively and qualitatively, a prime objective is to insure that anyone who visits our community will feel warmly welcomed and encouraged to return. We want to deliver a clear message of who we are and what we offer to those from the world at large who present themselves at our doorstep. We also want to empower all of our current members to spend a little more time and energy facing outward to offer loving, fulfilling relationships to those who are new to our community.

Our first three actions listed here are all "current" (the greeter program now being in its third year) and all are geared to increasing our number of new members. Given the current state of the economy and the relatively flat fundraising results over the past few years, it is likely that growth of membership (in numbers) is going afford us an increasingly important means of generating new energy and bolstering our financial health for the future. To date we have been quite successful at maintaining a group of 12-14 committed greeters who successfully covered virtually every Sunday service right through this past summer. At present our 6-month visitor data list, going back to May, includes 28 household listings that include 36 individuals, several of whom are now participating in our New Member Orientation Program. It is also the general impression

of the committee that a higher percentage of our congregation are becoming more attentive to new faces at our services and assisting with the welcoming process.

The primary financial costs for this action item are a portion of the salary of our estimable Membership Coordinator and the yearly re-stocking of our Welcome Packets. Volunteers from the congregation have been stepping forward at regular intervals to refresh the ranks of our greeter cadre.

Action # 2: Invite, educate and celebrate those who choose to become members.

Time Frame: Primarily biannually

- Steps:
- 1) Greet newcomers with enthusiasm and warmth (see Action # 1).
 - 2) Provide Welcome Packets to promote deeper inquiry (again see Action # 1).
 - 3) Provide biannual orientation sessions in the fall and the spring regarding both Unitarian Universalism in general and First Parish in particular for those who show interest in becoming members.
 - 4) Hold 1-2 Membership Sundays each year to celebrate our new members and to encourage our current members to remember why they chose to become members and what it takes to achieve deep and lasting membership at First Parish.

Priority Rating: 1

At the heart of our efforts to grow as a community is the charting of a clear path to membership and a deep understanding of the commitments that membership at First Parish requires. A thoughtful and challenging beginning will likely increase the chances of longer and more fulfilling memberships, and the community of First Parish will be strengthened by the infusion of different wisdoms that new members will bring.

The good news is that we have attracted an average of approximately 13-14 new members a year over the past ~ 3 years. The bad news is that an almost equal number seem to be slipping away from our ranks, giving us only a modest net gain. The 6-month visitor data list has provided our Membership Coordinator with a more comprehensive listing of whom to invite to explore further the elements of membership.

This action item depends primarily on the skill and periodic time commitment of our Minister and Membership Coordinator, with occasional assistance from members of the committee. Financial costs are limited to small gifts for new members and a luncheon and/or a cake to celebrate their arrival.

Action # 3: Actively reach out to the larger community to deliver our First Parish message.

Time Frame: At least bi-monthly during the church year.

- Steps:
- 1) Present a First Parish table each fall at Celebrate Milton to put on display our members' enthusiasm about our community, to remind Milton residents of First Parish's deep roots in the Milton community, and to afford a thoughtful "window" for curious passers-by who may be church-shopping.
 - 2) Hold at least one Bring-a-Friend-to-Church Sunday each year to encourage our current membership to become more practiced at actively delivering an enthusiastic message about First Parish.
 - 3) Encourage our members to consider inviting a friend from outside of First Parish to attend a Common Hearth program as a way to introduce them to First Parish on a more intimate scale.
 - 4) Continue to host the Handcrafting Justice Brunch each December and help to build this as a "signature event" that will draw a growing number of interested visitors from the larger community and represent First Parish as a community committed to social justice.
 - 5) Continue to provide regular announcements in print and electronic media of First Parish events that are open to the larger community, such as the Pancake Breakfast, Handcrafting Justice, Common Hearth, our holiday music programs, etc.
 - + 6) Consider making a bigger community splash with both our Music and Social Action programs by collaborating with Morningstar Baptist Church to stage a public singing event (please see Action # 5 below).

Priority Rating: 1

A policy of passively waiting for new prospective members to "find" us has succeeded only in keeping our membership numbers more or less stable over the past several years. Our expanded greeter program, now in its third year holds promise for boosting our retention rate for those who come looking for us, but if we are going to steady growth, we need to extend our reach, to keep thinking of new ways to carry our gifts and message into the world.

We are "marketing" ourselves in the local media more broadly than ever before, thanks to the efforts of our Membership Coordinator. We are also working to create an attitude shift within our membership that results in their thinking more proactively about specific "someones" in their life with whom they would like to share the news of First Parish. Our annual Bring-a-Friend-to-Church Sunday is mostly geared towards helping our members practice their thinking about this, but obviously any service will do, as well as using the Handcrafting Justice Weekend and our Wednesday Common Hearth

programs more frequently as more intimate entry points. We would like create more of a “habit of invitation.” And we would like to learn how to make better use of social media.

Our experience with inviting Town Meeting to First Parish last May was eye-opening, thanks largely to the foresight of some and the ebullience of others. We need to look for more opportunities like that, and Action # 5 below is one of our primary attempts to think outside the box.

Action # 4: Promote a richer interconnectedness and a more deeply spiritual membership among our current members.

Time Frame: Year around

- Steps: 1) Provide active support for more members to participate in the small group ministry program.
- 2) Provide/support regular opportunities for our members to connect socially outside of Sunday service, including a welcoming presence at the Pancake Breakfast; hosting the Handcrafting Justice Brunch, the Annual Budget Drive Kick-Off Celebration, and the End-of-the-Year Picnic; supporting the Intergenerational Games Nights, and promoting Circle Suppers.
- 3) Provide occasional membership building icebreakers in Social Hour.
- 4) Initiate efforts to explore more closely the reasons why former members have chosen to withdraw from participation at First Parish.
- +5) Make more room for singles in the life of our congregation (please see Action # 6 below).

Priority Rating: 1

In recent years much credit has been given for the various ways in which the First Parish community as a whole has done a good job of ministering to its membership, in terms of opportunities for spiritual and educational growth, pastoral care, and regular community-building social events. For most people a primary reason for affiliating with any church community is a need for spiritual, emotional, mental, and sometimes physical sustenance and a search for loving, fulfilling relationships. And yet despite some reasonably successful efforts at attracting new faces to our midst and caring for one another, we seem to be losing a number of folks each year “out the back door” and need to do a better job of at least understanding why. We have also become a very family-oriented community over the past 25 years, and the increasingly effective feedback afforded by our Membership Coordinator is suggesting that singles and couples without children at both ends of the age spectrum are finding it hard to establish a comfortable fit at First Parish. As a result we are considering Action # 6 below, still in its infancy.

That this action item is crucial to the church's institutional health is perhaps absurdly obvious, but an important question has been raised as to how and where to apply our resources most efficiently. It has been suggested that some of the social event coordinating, most notable the planning and executing of the Annual Budget Drive Kick-Off Celebration, has, while garnering significant positive feedback, notably absorbed a large amount of the Membership Committee's time, energy, and attention for 2+ months or more in each of the last two years. One of our goals is to review our membership directory (including some past directories) at least once a year and reach out by letter/phone contact to those that we have not seen in a while.

Of all of the Membership Committee's activities this action item probably consume the most resources for the committee and the community. The Handcrafting Justice Brunch, End-of-the-Year Picnic, and Circle Suppers are largely pot-luck affairs that involve little financial cost to the church but a fair amount of time and planning. The Annual Budget Drive Celebration has typically been funded out of the Finance Committee budget, and costs the past two years have averaged ~ \$1,900.00, a relatively modest sum. But some costs are almost always absorbed by the committee and those who assist, and the time commitment is significant.

Action # 5: Music on the Bridges: stage a highly public collaboration with Morningstar Baptist Church in the spring to have our choirs "sing off" to one another on the bridges that link Milton with Mattapan, emphasizing what joins us (the bridges) over what divides us (the river).

Time Frame: Would likely need at least 3-4 months prep time, could possibly be coordinated with the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute's Mother's Day Walk for Peace.

- Steps: 1) Secure agreement for the project from our own committees, notably the choir and Music Committee, Social Action Committee, and Parish Committee.
2) Reach out to Morningstar Baptist Church to explore the feasibility.
3) Contact the involved municipalities for necessary permits.
4) Explore technical/acoustic resources needed.
5) Etc.

Priority Rating: 1a

Last May First Parish got an enormous boost in notoriety when Milton's Town Meeting chose to hold their opening session in our meeting house. It helped to carry First Parish's message to the larger community and contributed to a sense of pride among our membership. First Parish needs more events like this, and a collaborative endeavor like

the one envisioned above would be built on a strength of each community while simultaneously celebrating our differences and making a bold social statement.

As with most first-time endeavors, it is difficult to know how to quantify the number we would reach. It would most likely have to take place either on a Sunday afternoon (especially if staged with the Mother's Day Walk for Peace) or on a Saturday. Most "witnesses" would be traveling through in their vehicles, but we would have a relatively "captive" audience, and the location(s) would be geographically appropriate for reaching to potential new membership. Holding the event on more than one bridge on different dates would perhaps be ideal, but likely ambitious for a first-time trial.

The obviously most valuable resources for each community would be the respective choirs, but a considerable amount of logistical support would also be needed to pull this off. Potentially the biggest obstacle would be securing the good will and permission of the respective municipalities, given the "attractive nuisance" potential for the event.

Action # 6: Make more room for young singles and couples without children within the within the life of our congregation.

Time Frame: Year around

- Steps: 1) Jamez has instituted a periodic young adult after-church brunch for 18-35 year-olds to help them get to know one another, build connections, and help them find or make a place for themselves at First Parish.
- 2) Visit other local UU congregations that have been successful at attracting and retaining singles and households without children to learn the secrets of their success.
- 3) Etc.

Priority Rating:

Given our demographics, it is likely that First Parish will continue to be a very family-focused congregation for the foreseeable future, and we have developed a reasonable range of programs to attract them. We also have been attracting a certain number of young singles and couples without children who are church-shopping, but anecdotal evidence suggests that a higher percentage of them tend to stop in, look around, and then keep looking elsewhere. Our hope is to learn more about what attracts them to other congregations and what we might do differently to entice them to stay.

