

First UU Church of Austin Long Range Plan (Summary of our Highest Aspirations) 2014-2019, and beyond

Introduction

By 2019, First UU Church of Austin will have much better visibility locally and in the denomination, for being a church in whose life and worship the arts are prominent, for a major impact on a signature social justice issue, and for growing our faith. We will build upon our current strengths and strive towards the highest aspirations of our members, as articulated in the church's mission and ends.

We envision First UU Church of Austin as a true “mother church,” growing UUism in the Austin area. Every person of good will who wants to participate should find room at the table and a warm welcome. This portion of the plan has particular urgency due to the vibrantly growing demographics of Austin and First UU’s real and growing challenge of overcrowding.

From long-term projects like Paradox Players and the Gallery to the arrival of our musically-talented minister, First UU has strength in the arts. The arts represent a powerful vehicle for connecting us as a community and making us something larger than ourselves. Therefore, we will continue to nourish and grow the arts as an integral part of how we minister within and beyond our walls.

We will make a multi-year commitment to church-wide engagement on a signature social justice issue: a cause which will enlist a variety of personalities and abilities at a variety of levels. We will make a significant impact on that issue, transforming the lives of others and those of our own members in the process.

To achieve these goals we will pursue specific targets in the following areas:

1. Social Justice
2. Lifespan Faith Development
3. Community
4. Membership & Generosity
5. Sunday Worship
6. The Arts
7. Ministry and Staffing
8. Facility and Equipment
9. Efficient and Visionary Governance
10. Communications Strategy

Goals by May 2019

1. Social Justice

We believe that lives are transformed by love-inspired service done with an open and teachable heart. Our youth and adults will participate frequently in all-church justice outreach projects, on service trips, and in ongoing justice action projects.

Benchmarks of success will include:

- We give away the collection plate every week to support the congregation's social justice priorities.
- Our budget supporting social justice issues increases by 4% each year over the previous year.
- Our social justice outreach is strong.
- We will strive to increase our hands on approach to social justice.
- We will have an ongoing project with disadvantaged and/or marginalized youth. This might take the form of a math tutoring program on site (competence in algebra by 8th grade is a significant factor in success as an adult), an after school program with special effort given to the inclusion of GLBTQ youth, or work with immigrant youth. We will find a neighborhood school to partner with in a mentoring program.
- We have high visibility for one signature social justice issue at a time. We will make a significant, ongoing impact on this issue and be well-known in Central Texas for it.
- Our Freeze Night capacity grows three times current size.
- We are recognized in the press for our social justice stands and achievements.
- Anti-oppression training for the congregation, including more than 15% having attended special anti-oppression training.
- Our Green Sanctuary program continues to grow.
- We achieve a high level of participation for people of all ages and abilities.
- We found a summer camp for Multi-racial families

2. Lifespan Faith Development

Our RE teachers will be drawn from all ages of adults in the congregation, as religious education will be seen as the responsibility of the whole congregation rather than solely of the parents.

As an individual becomes part of this congregation, s/he will have a clear path to becoming a person with a spiritual practice, someone who is connected with a multi-generational community with which to interact, a person who is a trained leader, someone with a clear understanding of Unitarian Universalism and the confidence to express themselves as a Unitarian Universalist.

Benchmarks of success include:

- Sunday children's attendance reaches 200, with strong parent engagement.
- We have a strong team of volunteer teachers who are well trained, supported by professional staff and feel strongly engaged in the lives of the children they teach.
- We will have monthly children's chapel.
- We have thriving, well-organized junior and senior high school youth groups. They go to rallies, on mission trips and they carry their UU identity with them to college and beyond.

Average attendance between the two is 50 kids. They are interwoven into congregational life.

- We have 10 adult chalice circles with a total attendance of 100 people.
- Our child care is safe, friendly and professional; offered in an attractive and comfortable setting.
- We offer a wide variety of adult religious education, including leadership, life and professional skills, spiritual growth, and more.
- A stronger sense of UU identity among our members.
- We use our Covenant of Healthy Relations as a spiritual discipline, grounding our church life in loyalty to the Spirit of Love. Our Healthy Relations Team will guide us in revisiting our covenant on a regular basis.
- Our Public Affairs Forum becomes well known in central TX for hosting nationally traveling speakers (e.g., Naomi Wolf, Paul Krugman). These events sell out, and generate income for the congregation.

3. Community

We will nurture communication and connection among all members and friends.

Benchmarks of success include:

- Wednesday nights are packed. We have a full meal, 20 classrooms full of adult RE, children's activities, chalice circles and committee meetings.
- We build up our small group ministry program until at least 30 percent of the congregation is participating in a small group.
- We maintain weekly activities geared toward seniors (e.g., senior lunch).
- A strong sense of community and fellowship continues and grows in our adult choir, ministry teams, Paradox Players, and other groups that do the work of the church.
- We create more opportunities for intergenerational interaction, so that children will feel known and loved by the adults in the congregation.
- The Pastoral Care Associates and the Caring Ministry continue to care for First UU members who are ill or in need. We stay as clear as possible on what the church can and can't do for its members in need. What we do, we do well.
- We connect with other UU congregations by hosting leadership events and training. We are one of our region's flagship churches where regional trainings are held. We send significant numbers of congregants to district events, to leadership training, and to General Assembly.

4. Membership & Generosity

Members of First UU Church feel a high level of engagement and connection. They apply hospitality with excellence to their personal, professional, and church lives. They invite their friends and family regularly to worship and other activities. We have plenty of room to welcome all people of goodwill. Members are engaged generously with their time, treasure, and talent.

Benchmarks of success will include:

- Our membership is above 700 by 2019.

- The “feel” of the community is intimate and friendly. There is a wide variety of opportunities for in-depth sharing, shared activities, fellowship, and shoulder-to-shoulder efforts to live out principles.
- Attrition is under 10% (normal is 8-12%. First UU had a significantly higher rate until 2011).
- All new members have a mentor who helps them get acclimated and involved.
- By the end of new members’ first year they will be as engaged as they would like in the life of the congregation; they will have a strong group of friends at the church.
- We have room and staffing to include every person of good will who wants to be part of the church (up to our goal of 800-1000 members, maximum).
- Each member hears from the church at least quarterly, outside of the congregation’s direct stewardship efforts.
- Our annual survey shows a 90% satisfaction rate with the church in general.
- Our members remember the church in their wills.
- Increasing numbers of members understand generosity and are making progress towards giving generously, within their means, to First UU and other important causes.
- Our pledge income is up 30% per member from 2012 levels.
- A critical mass of our members practice hospitality with excellence. This includes treating all people at all times with dignity and respect, including people of all faiths, races, political parties, economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and so forth. We will do this by strengthening the visibility and viability of our covenant of healthy relations, engaging members in training about micro-aggressions, and other means.
- We are recognized by the UUA as a congregation of note, using whatever language they are employing at that time.

5. Sunday Worship

We will continue to have engaging and varied worship experiences. Our sanctuary and overflow space will be equipped with screens, projectors, internet, and all technical means necessary for worship to be transforming, nourishing, challenging and beautiful.

Benchmarks of success will include:

- Our worship space comfortably holds 500.
- Worship attendance averages 500-700 over several services.
- We provide a hot Sunday morning meal.
- We provide rides to church for those who need them.
- A third service begins in 2016 and is growing in attendance under an assistant minister’s leadership.
- The music program continues to be strong. Three children’s choirs, elementary, Middle School, and High School, are strong, and they participate in worship at least once a month.
- The adult choir has paid section leaders, 80% of choir members read music, and the choir expands its social action as a group (e.g., adding a choir exchange, performing at nursing homes, performing at hospitals to their Caregivers Benefit concert, Mostly Music Marathon, and other charitable activities).
- The Music Director would be full-time and have a part-time assistant.

6. The Arts

Austin is an arts town and First UU's identity includes a serious art component. Few other churches use the arts as a significant component of their ministry. We will continue to strengthen this identity because it is a part of who we are, it speaks to many of our members, and a significant niche remains to be filled locally by this kind of church.

Rather than art for the sake of art, First UU will incorporate art throughout our activity areas in order to make them memorable and unique.

Benchmarks of success will include:

- We double our Paradox Players seating capacity. Paradox Players has a dedicated room in the building for its use (such as an office).
- We host many more musical activities and are better-known as a music venue (e.g., partnership with Austin Chamber Music Society, SXSW venue).
- We create an arts outreach program. This could take the form of an artist-in-residence who will teach and add art to church life in exchange for studio space.
- Visual arts find increased exposure both in terms of available space and in terms of community outreach. The openings of monthly exhibits receive strong attendance from the community. Top-notch artists see First UU as a desirable location to display their work.

7. Ministry & Staffing

Successful staffing of ministry and other positions of a large church form a key ingredient for success. We will continue to move towards appropriate staffing levels and to increase the opportunities for lay leaders to perform ministry functions as well.

Benchmarks of success include:

- We have a Sr. Minister
- We hired an Assistant Minister (hired in 2014). The Assistant Minister has a portfolio of RE, social justice and pastoral care.
- We hire an Assistant Minister (fall of 2014) with a portfolio of Administration and Finance.
- We begin a ministerial intern program, in the fall of 2014, supporting a variety of ministries such as social justice, youth, and pastoral care.
- We have other program, administrative, and support staff as appropriate.
- We have highly engaged lay leaders as appropriate in pastoral care, leadership, social action, administrative support, etc.
- When we reach 800 members we either hire from within or externally an Assistant Minister to gather 200 people with the intention to begin a new church.

8. Facility & Equipment

We have a facility that matches our aspirations and that allows us to focus our energies on our mission.

Benchmarks of success include:

- A kitchen with at least three times our current capacity.
- We are fully ADA compliant.
- We have top of the line audio-visual technology, that accommodates the visually and hearing impaired, remains relevant to and engages an increasingly tech-savvy membership base, maximizes the enjoyment and transcendence of musical performances, and allows us to make the most of our faith-development classes.
- We have beautiful xeriscaping, readily visible from the street, which improves and inspires the neighborhood.
- We remain in our current location.
- We have a membership data base and technology that meets our needs and aspirations.
- We are a popular venue for weddings.
- We will work creatively with our parking challenges.
- We host regional events.

9. Efficient and Visionary Governance

The Board will continue to deepen its understanding of Policy-Based Governance. Through ongoing two-way conversation with the congregation, it determines the congregations will and aspirations, then provides the leadership to steer us that way. Board members will lead by developing themselves as spiritual, wise and differentiated people, finding the relationship between leading and listening. A Leadership Development Team will be assembled to identify, recruit and train capable and committed leaders for the church.

10. Communication Strategy

Our internal communications will engage our members. We will use marketing for the purposes of visibility and self-definition. Press releases, newspaper columns, press interviews, and other communications will build visibility of the church in local press. Signature social justice issue and patronage of the arts will strengthen our ability to attract press and general awareness of our church in the broader community.

Long-term growth strategy

Hundreds of visitors find First UU every year. We are a magnet church for the region and people are drawn to us.

The congregation has told us, through its mission and ends, that it wants to create a space at the table for every person of good will who cares to join us. Fundamentally, we believe Central Texas and this country benefit if every potential UU is an active UU – and we have thousands within just a few miles of our church. We have a life-saving message and we want it to reach every person who yearns to hear it.

As a practical matter, we have to be intentional to meet this ambitious yet achievable goal of creating a seat at the table for every person of good will who cares to join us.

Likewise, we should be intentional about the target size of First UU church so we can plan, build, and staff appropriately. We need to creatively use the existing facility to its maximum potential.

Given the tremendous growth potential of UU faith in the Central Texas area (see appendix 1), we want to make sure that once we reach our target capacity that we can continue to make space for newcomers. That requires planting churches.

Stefan Jonasson, the UUA's consultant on church growth, has confirmed for us that new church plantings require a critical mass of around 200 members on day one. They require good ministerial and lay leadership and funding. Without these four elements on day one, a new church will find it very difficult to flourish. With these elements, it has a strong possibility of success.

Thus, as we get within three to five years of reaching our full membership capacity we will look for an assistant minister with the specific goal that that person will, at the end of her/his ministry with us, lead and help plant a new UU church and take about 200 of our members along.

We want to see, within 20 years, many strong, large UU churches in the Central Texas area. Each one will have its own distinct identity: a particular strength, specialty, or focus that helps it stand out in the crowd and attracts people from different walks of life. These could take forms such as the campus ministry church at UT, a social justice church, a sustainable living church, a Spanish-language church, and maybe even a punk rock church on 6th Street.

Only in this way can we fulfill our mission and ends, and create a space for every person of goodwill who wants to join us.

All Souls church in DC provides us with something of a model for this church planting strategy. In 1944, with just two UU churches and 1,100 members in the area, they found themselves with overwhelming demand they could not satisfy themselves. By 1969 they had grown to 12 churches in the DC area and 6,100 members. Almost all of those 10 new churches were either planted by All Souls or were planted by churches All Souls had planted.

And what about First UU’s target size? At our current size, of close to 600 members, close to our top capacity for perhaps 600, a loss of 200 members would devastate us. For this strategy to work sustainably, we have a goal of 800-1000 members.

The Long-Term Impact of the Mother/Daughter Church Strategy

Long-term, we expect this strategy to produce a variety of dividends. These include:

- Hundreds more individuals and families who find strength, comfort, and inspiration through their UU faith and community
- Our faith and message are literally life-saving for many people. The multiplication of our churches and collective capacity will make them available to hundreds and hundreds of additional people who hunger for them
- Hundreds more children who develop the courage, knowledge, and support to become their authentic selves and to be effective allies to those who are oppressed
- Significantly larger numbers of individuals who engage in the social justice issues that we feel passionate about
- A greater capacity for Central Texas UUs to engage and commit deeply to social justice issues as each daughter church takes on one or two “signature” issues
- A greater diversity of expressions of faith as each daughter church engages in faith development from different perspectives and serves different demographics (e.g., the campus ministry church that serves students or the sustainable living church that is off the grid)

Timeline Highlights

2013	Hire Capital Campaign Consultants; begin prep
2014	Capital Campaign; planning begins Hire Assistant Minister
2015	Construction begins Ministerial Intern
2016	Facilities now match our mission and vision Begin review/updating of mission and ends
2017	Updated mission and ends complete Senior Minister sabbatical begins in fall
2018	Senior Minister returns from sabbatical in spring, refreshed and with a strategy to implement the updated mission and ends
2019	First strong UU offshoot church planted

Long Range Plan Team

Phil Hastings, Valerie Sterne, Brendan Sterne, Michael West, Sharon Moore, Jairy Grisaffe, Doris Bufford, Ron Bufford, Sean Hale, Carol Drennan and Meg Barnhouse worked together to develop this plan.

[Draft plan, last updated by Carol Drennan for Meg Barnhouse on 5/27/2014.]

APPENDIX 1: HISTORICAL AND PROJECTED GROWTH

First UU Church of Austin Membership Growth Potential/Projection

	Growth Rate	New Members	Total Members (EOY)	# Of Members Lost	Rate of Attrition	Net Change # of Members
2028	18%	262	1562	155	9%	107
2027	18%	244	1455	144	9%	100
2026	18%	227	1355	134	9%	93
2025	18%	212	1262	125	9%	87
2024	18%	197	1175	116	9%	81
2023	18%	183	1094	108	9%	75
2022	18%	171	1019	101	9%	70
2021	18%	159	949	94	9%	65
2020	18%	148	884	87	9%	61
2019	18%	138	823	81	9%	57
2018	18%	128	766	76	9%	53
2017	18%	102	714	71	9%	49
2016	18%	111	665	66	9%	46
2015	18%	104	619	61	9%	43
2014	18%	97	577	57	9%	40

Actual Growth / Retention Data through 2013

2013	20%	108	535	73	13%	35
2012	18%	82	500	43	9.3%	39
2011	17%	71	461	29	6.9%	42
2010	10%	51	419	136	27%	-85
2009	10%	55	504	118	20.8%	-63
2008	18%	96	567	65	12.0%	32
2007	19%	100	536	100	18.7%	0
2006	14%	76	536	81	14.9%	-5
2005	17%	100	540	160	26.7%	-60
2004	17%	101	600	93	15.7%	8
2003	14%	82	592	94	15.6%	-12
2002	22%	126	604	91	16.0%	35
2001	19%	102	569	72	13.4%	30
2000	17%	79	539	15	3.2%	64
1999	12%	57	475	54	11.4%	3
1998	19%	74	472	0	0	74
1997	20%	76	398	56	14.8%	20
1996	26%	88	378	54	15.7%	34
1995	26%	92	344	105	29.4%	-13
1994	20%	71	357	68	19.2%	3
1993	20%	70	354	60	17.4%	10
1992	20%	70	344	74	21.3%	-4
1991	23%	70	348	32	10.3%	38
1990	30%	92	310	92	29.7%	0
1989	30%	97	310	111	34.3%	-14

1988	18%	56	324	46	14.6%	10
1987	28%	86	314	82	26.5%	4
1986			310			

Note: if we had been organized and built for normal retention (between 8-12%) starting 25 years ago, instead of having egregiously bad retention, Central Texas would have 1,000 more UUs than it has today. That's more than double, and Austin would have been a better place for it.

APPENDIX 2: FAQ REGARDING THE CHURCH'S SPACE NEEDS

What do you mean there isn't room for new people here?

Its true.

Last year, second service, which is the one that most people want to attend, was full more than half the time.

Its important to understand what "full" means as well, especially when it comes to visitors and prospective new members. When you enter a space you know well, and its full of people you know well, it may feel comfortable to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with those people.

When it's a new space, and a new activity, and people you don't know, then when a space reaches 80% capacity it looks and feels full. Can you remember ever being in that situation? For most people, that situation feels very uncomfortable and unwelcoming.

We have a growing number of young families with children joining as well, so we are pressed for Religious Education space on Sunday mornings. Just a few years ago, we had three or four Adult RE activities on Sunday mornings, we can no longer host them at that time.

Many members have expressed an interest in events like an "invite a friend Sunday," but we just simply don't have space for it.

Don't we have plenty of unused space already?

Yes and no. When we have unused space, it is at non-peak hours. During the times that people want to be at church, especially Sunday morning, we have run out of space.

Many week-day nights, especially Wednesday, we have a lot of activity for adults and children. We expect those activities to continue to grow.

Can't we add a third or fourth service?

The experience of other churches, and this one, is that a third service with the same minister will exhaust the minister and not have comparable attendance. Peak attendance happens around 10:00 or 10:30 in the morning. Services outside those times, as a general rule, will not alleviate the crowding at peak times.

Doesn't the church already have a plan to build the facility we need here?

Yes and no.

The church invested a lot of time and money from 2004-2008 in trying to make that happen. It paid an architectural firm to put together the costs of having a facility that, in many ways, would match our goals and aspirations.

The costs of having that facility is \$15,000,000. That's roughly \$50,000 per each of our 300 households. Another way of looking at it, is that every household would need to make a special capital campaign gift of 30 times their current pledge, which could be paid over five years. So, if your regular pledge is \$2,500 per year, you'd need to make a capital campaign gift of \$15,000 every year for five years, on top of your regular annual pledge.

While perhaps some families do have the capacity to give at that level, we expect they are rare. In fact, most church capital campaign consultants will tell you that they can raise about three times your annual giving during a good campaign, and less when the economy is tough.

The congregation could reduce the up front costs of expanding our current facility and capacity by taking out a loan or using savings. However, this congregation, in the past, has shown a strong reluctance to take on any debt or spending its savings.

Can't people just go to Wildflower and Live Oak UU churches?

Unlike Walmart and McDonalds, no two UU churches are alike. Each of our three churches has a different feel and different culture. For a variety of reasons, First UU is the church that most people want to go to. Every Sunday, we have many families that drive past Wildflower and Live Oak to participate in our worship service, fellowship, religious education programming, and more.

This is not a judgment on how they do church, just a recognition that there are many ways of doing church and each way of doing church draws a different constituency and has different potentials for growth.

We can't "give" them members. It would not be appropriate for us to tell members in certain neighborhoods that they can't come here and instead they should attend the church that is closest to them.

Of course, if our neighboring churches would like to learn how to do things the way we do them, we welcome it and would be happy to share and help.

It's important for us to remember, likewise, that we are not competing with anyone for members. Most of our new members are people who do not have any church at all right now. We believe firmly that Austin, and America, have tremendous potential for the growth of UUism. If just 1% of Austin started attending UU services, a number that represents probably just the lowest hanging fruit, that would be 10,000 people ... more than 10 times the current membership in the Austin area.

Could we plant new churches now, without increasing the size of our facility?

To plant a strong new church, it would need on day 1 a minimum of 200 members, a minister, and other support. With our current size and capacity, it would radically harm this church to lose that many members at once.

To plant a smaller church would run a very strong and real risk that it would fail to flourish and reach its full potential. When we plant a new church, we want it to grow and thrive.

Could we add some portable buildings?

Though portable buildings cost less than permanent buildings, they can have significant drawbacks. The layout of the permanent buildings makes the addition of any portable building awkward in terms of esthetics and logistics. Each portable building we might add would exacerbate our parking shortage.

So, we see portable buildings as only a short-term solution. Many of the needs and opportunities we have identified go back twenty years or more. The church is ready and eager for a permanent solution to its space challenges.

Are we sure we would fill a larger building? How would we afford the larger costs to operate a larger facility?

We have ample evidence of the unmet demand for UUism in Central Texas:

- The numbers of visitors and new members First UU has received for decades, rain or shine
- The documented numbers of people nationwide who already consider themselves UU but do not attend church regularly (for a variety of reasons)
- What happened in the DC metro area when they engaged in an intentional strategy to grow the capacity to meet demand

Thus, this is not a matter of “build it and they will come” but rather “they keep coming, lets hurry up and build it.”

This strategy, none-the-less, takes a step-by-step approach. We can accomplish this plan without taking on a long-term mortgage or dipping into savings. We can accomplish it without taking large risks.

By continuing to create a space at a table for all people of good will wish to join us, we will have sufficient members to afford this without ever proselytizing. Those new members are pledging and giving at levels much higher than in the past, and additional long-term members have also been growing into a culture of generosity.

APPENDIX 3: A BRIEF, ROUGH HISTORY OF OUR FACILITY

1963 – Howson Hall, kitchen and current gallery space built. Howson Hall served as main worship space for more than 20 years. Note: the kitchen we have now was built to serve the church we were 50 years ago.

1967 – Religious Education Wing built. Note: we have not added classroom space in 45 years even though the congregation has grown tremendously in size.

1988 – New Sanctuary inaugurated. Note: the sanctuary, on inauguration day, did not have enough room to seat everyone who attended.

1993 – A church planning group identifies the need and desire to expand religious education space.

2000 – The church's Long Range Plan reiterated an urgent need for more space.

2006 – 2008 – A new building plan gains considerable momentum, but ultimately stalled out because of ministerial dismissal and unfeasible price tag.