

Unitarian Church of Montpelier
Governing Board Working Priorities for 2021 and Beyond
To be approved by the Board - May 2021

INTRODUCTION: In 2015 the leadership and congregation of the Unitarian Church of Montpelier (UCM) participated in an extensive internal visioning process resulting in the [2020 Vision](#) and the [2020 Strategic Plan](#). From 2015-2021 tremendous efforts were made by the Board and other congregational teams, committees, and work forces to live into our vision and to successfully implement the strategic plan, including the [Building For the Future](#) project.

One of the roles of the UCM Governing Board, as expressed in section 6.1.1 in our bylaws, is to “Establish annual and long-term goals for the Congregation and monitor and evaluate progress toward the achievement of those goals.” In light of this responsibility, the Board engages in a process of ongoing reflection and action as a way of living into a vision that is constantly shaped by changing circumstances. At the beginning of the 2020-21 church year, the Board created a ReVisioning Task Force to assess how to continue living into a congregational vision beyond 2020.

First, this Task Force proposed modest modifications to the 2020 Vision statement, to make it a more enduring document with no time or location constraints. In May, 2021 the Board adopted [this modified working Vision document](#).

Second, this Addendum to the modified Vision was crafted to reflect the thinking of the Board and Task Force about three key aspects of the particularly troublesome environment in which UCM now exists. All three are of utmost importance to our community and are intricately and intimately inter-related: (1) an increasingly divided and turbulent nation facing the challenge of white supremacy and systemic racism; (2) the escalating climate crisis, and (3) the COVID-19 pandemic.

THREE KEY FACTORS

(1) Systemic racism and a culture of power and privilege

The situation: In 2020 systemic racism and police brutality escalated and became even more palpable as numerous Black lives were lost to violence, prompting a renewed and expanded justice movement both worldwide and locally. In the wake of the 2020 presidential election, we witnessed attacks on the democratic process, insurrection, violence, and destruction by extremists at the US Capitol Building - all of which clearly displayed the white supremacy, nationalism and racism that is still deeply embedded in our nation, and provides ongoing threats to the safety and dignity of our members and friends and community members of color.

UCM’s response: We acknowledge and prioritize the dismantling of systems of power and privilege that are long-established in the US and locally. As we continue to understand and challenge the nature of power, privilege and domination, the Board intends to review and create church policies that allow for responsive and adaptive

solutions to accommodate the significant shifts in our culture that may be needed to evolve our understanding of love and justice in our community and its work.

UCM will continue to embrace emerging and ancestral practices of inclusion, transparency and equity, and to codify these methods when appropriate. For example, In accordance with the 2020 Vision and Strategic Plan, UCM studied White Privilege and then adopted its first Covenant of Right Relations. We are committed to both the joy and discomfort associated with this shift in culture. We work together within our mutual understanding of this Covenant, which we develop collaboratively as necessary with new understandings of our community's aspirations.

(2) The escalating climate crisis

The situation: Mounting scientific and physical evidence continues to point to the escalation of the global climate crisis; with record numbers of devastating forest fires, hurricanes, and climbing CO2 levels - there is a growing need to lighten our human footprint on this earth. This situation is a threat to the safety of our community and to BIPOC and coastal communities worldwide.

UCM's response: In accordance with the original 2020 Vision and Strategic Plan, congregants crafted a plan to achieve a NetZero use of fossil fuels at UCM. On March 10, 2020 — just before UCM closed its building due to the COVID-19 pandemic — the Steering Committee for Building For the Future (BFF) agreed to recommend to the Board [BFF priorities including NetZero](#). In the spring of 2021, the Board is pursuing a congregational vote to move forward with elements of the NetZero plan, including to improve the ventilation and related heating systems at UCM. Doing so will also help the church address air safety issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. The congregation will continue to be responsive to calls for action and solidarity in response to the climate crisis and will seek ways to take action collectively and as individuals to support sustainability at the local and global level. The Climate Action Team will be a guiding force within the congregation for our collective activities that address the climate crisis from our UU values.

(3) The Global Pandemic

The situation: Early in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread across the globe, claiming lives and disrupting everyday routines for people everywhere. In Vermont, a state of emergency was declared to allow the Governor to manage the public health crisis caused by the virus. By mid-March 2020 a “stay-at-home” mandate prohibited public gatherings, which matched guidance from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), and led to the closing of the UCM building. Even though vaccines are now being distributed, the pandemic still dictates day-to-day activities and most of our church programs, which, while centered on Sunday worship, also include an array of projects, collaborations, and initiatives.

UCM's response: The Executive Team, church staff, and Board have been carefully researching how to keep the congregation safe when the building reopens. This involves at least thoroughly and frequently cleaning, disinfecting, and ventilating the space as well as establishing protocols for the conditions under which we greet, meet, work, worship, eat, and sing together again.

Within and without the church building, we support each other and our broader community through this global crisis. We adapt our methods of both worship and conducting business to include online and remote collaboration and care. We continue to evolve our technical capacity and creativity to address these challenges.

CONCLUSION: As expressed through our Vision and Mission statements, our beloved, democratic, spiritual community at UCM aspires to be peacemakers, justice-seekers and loving people of the world. We feel called to create and embody solutions to face systemic problems with grace and love. The congregation looks to the Board and Staff for guidance and pastoral care as we experience the three key factors described above and other emerging difficulties. The Board's choice of working priorities helps us all stay focused and work together toward solutions as a community, while we discover and navigate towards an emerging visioning process together.