

A New Partnership for the Growth of Large Congregations

A Proposal from The Unitarian Society of New Haven, CT, and
The First Unitarian Church of Worcester, MA

Summary:

The Unitarian Society of New Haven (USNH) and the First Unitarian Church of Worcester are proposing a new vision for the growth of Unitarian Universalism by accelerating the transition from midsize to large congregations. We envision an innovative new Partnership for Growth between the denomination and congregations that supports and nurtures intentional and deliberate growth.

Both USNH and the First Unitarian Church of Worcester have undertaken long range planning and visioning processes that have helped clarify our mission to provide a liberal religious home for all those who seek it. We have seen that the energy and dynamism of large congregations greatly enhance the possibilities for spiritual development within our fold as well as the opportunities for service in our communities. Growth in our congregations also provides a dramatic return of talent, energy and revenue to the UUA and supports the denomination in its effort to grow Unitarian Universalism both in numbers and in influence in the wider society.

We believe that our two congregations are perfectly positioned to demonstrate how a carefully conceived and executed partnership of support between the denomination and midsize congregations can accelerate the transition into large congregations. Both USNH and First Unitarian Church have hovered for a number of years at the upper end of midsize: 350-450 members, strong and healthy as institutions but not quite "bridging" into the next level of growth. In the last several years each has made deliberate decisions to embrace the future as a large congregation, and to examine and remove obstacles to our growth. This year, both congregations successfully concluded multi-million dollar building programs to provide the invitational space necessary for our growth. Both congregations are led by senior ministers with long tenure who offer strong and visionary leadership.

USNH and the First Unitarian Church are two members of a cluster of five congregations in the Clara Barton District which share similarities of size and an expansive vision of our liberal faith and its importance in the communities we serve. Through the Partnership for Growth we will strengthen not only our ties to the UUA but the lateral relationships already begun within this cluster, which includes the Universalist Church of West Hartford, the Unitarian Society of Hartford and the Unitarian Society of Florence and Northampton. Ministers from all five churches have been meeting together for two years to offer support, insight and ideas for growth and development. With the assistance of a Partnership for Growth with the UUA, we believe there is great potential for all five of these Clara Barton congregations to increase by 200-300 members each within the next four to six years.

We propose USNH as the initial pilot project for how to accelerate growth and successfully navigate the transition to a large congregation. The USNH Partnership for Growth with the UUA envisions a four-year investment of resources drawn from three primary sources: Unitarian Universalist institutional sources, including the UU Funding Program and the UUA (from the monies designated for "growing and healthy congregations" within the Capital Campaign or from other sources); our own generous donors; and individual Unitarian Universalists from other congregations who are committed to the growth of our denomination (see details below, in "Funding the Partnership for Growth"). These funds will result in an immediate expansion of the programming that will attract and support new members to our congregation, and will strengthen the lateral relationships between USNH and the other midsize congregations in the Clara Barton District to aid in the rapid replication of this model.

At the end of this four-year partnership we expect that USNH will be a large congregation of 600 or more members, capable of robust self-sufficiency at this new size and eager and willing to assist other congregations who share a vision for growth. We are designing a systematic evaluation program to foster the replicability of our blueprints for growth. We will use survey research, interviews and focus groups to explore which outreach techniques were most successful in attracting visitors, which characteristics distinguish casual visitors from those who become members and which elements of our programs and opportunities were most engaging to new members and most effective in retaining existing members.

This process of documentation will include resource-sharing with the midsize cluster of churches in the Clara Barton District, a collaboration that will expand as each of the four other churches devise their own goals and strategies for the Partnership for Growth. We anticipate that the First Unitarian Church of Worcester will add its specific goals and proposals before the end of 2004, followed closely by the other three congregations (see summary pages for each congregation, attached). This collaboration in strategies, documentation and evaluation will allow us to create a model for growth with the UUA that can be adapted for use with other midsize congregations. Because our five congregations differ from one another in some significant ways, findings that are common among them will very likely be 'best practices' for other congregations as well.

The Unitarian Society of New Haven

Recent History and Decisions For Growth:

USNH was founded in 1952 and has grown to be a dynamic congregation of nearly 400 adult members and 160 children. Over the last ten years average adult attendance on Sunday mornings has increased by over 50%, from roughly 185 in 1993 to nearly 300 by early 2004. In the same period of time our membership has grown from 335 to almost 400, and the annual operating budget has increased from \$207,000 to \$502,000.

Our growth during these last ten years was made possible by clear congregational choices toward mission and vision. In 1997 we expanded to two worship services and RE programs, prompted by our growing attendance and our commitment to make room for all those who need the sustaining message of our faith.

In 2000 we began a long-range planning process to determine our priorities for the future. This process led to an expansive vision of our congregation as a vibrant center for spiritual growth and for the nurture and sustenance of religiously grounded social justice work. Our successful 2001-03 capital campaign to expand our worship space was a resounding affirmation of our vision. Despite a daunting economic climate, \$1.5 million was raised from within the congregation and a mortgage of \$850,000 was assumed. In September 2003 USNH completed the construction of our beautiful new 400-seat sanctuary, thereby removing space limitations as the primary obstacle to our growth.

USNH Vision

In order to fulfill the potential we have now created we intend to expand the programs that are at the heart of our congregational life, which have also proven to be our primary "engines" for growth. These include multiple opportunities for worship and spiritual development, our many social justice ministries, and an expanded community life through Small Groups Ministry and other adult programs.

Our strategy to strengthen and grow our congregation focuses on three areas: expansion of our core programs, both to provide sustenance and spiritual growth for current members and to offer more "entry points" for newcomers; a broad and systematic strategy of membership tracking and development; and increased publicity and outreach in the New Haven community, especially to the growing population of young adults. When added to our existing programs and structure, these strategic areas of expansion will increase our visibility in the greater New Haven area, encourage visitors toward a pathway to membership, and assist new members in becoming deeply connected and committed to their new religious home.

Our primary need during the four years of the Partnership for Growth is investment in new staff positions to develop and sustain our expansion in the three areas outlined above. In addition to the current staff at USNH, this will mean adding a full-time

Coordinator for Member Services (year one), a full-time Program Minister (year two), and additional staffing for children and youth religious education (year three).

Year One: Membership Development

Coordinator for Member Services: An immediate result of our construction of the new sanctuary has been a steady stream of new visitors to USNH, many of them young families. In anticipation of these newcomers we have already strengthened our ability to greet and assimilate visitors, and in the next few years will build on and strengthen these initiatives. In order to expand our outreach to visitors and our ability to track and welcome new members, particularly young adults, we require a Coordinator for Member Services. Staff responsibilities include the following:

New Member Services: We have a well-established and very active Membership Committee whose members have studied methods for visitor assimilation and the various 'pathways to membership' with which other congregations have found success. Among many other elements of the welcome we offer to newcomers is a three-session class held three times each year as an orientation for prospective new members. This winter we added an introduction to Small Groups Ministry onto the end of the History and Heritage class, inviting our newcomers to participate in four SGM sessions; this experiment has been a resounding success.

Building on this eager interest on the part of newcomers, we intend to expand our welcome in the following ways:

- expand the opportunities for Small Groups Ministry tailored specifically for visitors and new members;
- increase the frequency of the History and Heritage class
- strengthen our new member services through more personal follow-up with visitors, social functions and spiritual development classes designed for "seekers", increased coordination of our leadership outreach to visitors, and a well-honed ability not only to track visitors through the membership process but to track new members through at least the first year of membership, helping them become connected, committed members.

Young Adults Ministry: In recent years the city of New Haven has made aggressive changes in the downtown area with the specific goal of attracting young professionals to relocate to our area. This effort has met with remarkable success, as documented in recent news stories about the influx of young adults to the area (see attached article, [Hartford Courant](#)). USNH has observed this demographic shift within our own walls, especially since the spring of 2003 when we began to see a steady stream of couples in their twenties and early thirties, often newly married or with an infant in tow.

We have begun two young adult groups in the past year, one designed for young adults with children and the other for singles or for couples who are childless (there is friendly overlap of the two groups but their interests diverge enough to prompt two approaches). We intend to strengthen these initiatives in the coming years and

couple them with outreach targeted specifically to the young adults now moving to New Haven.

Publicity and Outreach:

With the completion of our new sanctuary this fall, USNH has already begun efforts to publicize our congregation more widely. New initiatives undertaken in 2003-04 included timely press releases and follow-up media work for newsworthy events. Our most notable success in this regard was extremely broad, favorable media coverage of an October vespers service honoring equal marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples.

Media outreach on the part of skilled USNH volunteers will continue as part of our publicity efforts. In addition we intend to expand our website (an increasingly effective outreach tool for young adults); host a series of well-publicized concerts as a joint endeavor with the local Pacifica radio station; and begin advertising in targeted markets, specifically in the newspapers serving the local gay and lesbian populations and within the large research and academic community of Yale University. These initiatives will require the support of our Coordinator for Member Services

Year Two: Program Expansion

Full-time Program Minister: Our congregational life revolves around the worship services we offer; classes for both adults and children and other small group opportunities for spiritual development; and our social justice commitments in the wider society. Our ability to meet the needs of both current and future members depends on the richness and variety of these core services. Their expansion will require a full-time Program Minister, to be called during the second year of the Partnership for Growth. Staff responsibilities will include the following:

Small Groups Ministry: Small Groups Ministry has been a vital part of congregational life for over three years, and currently involves over two hundred members in both curricula-focused and activity groupings. Our experiment this winter with specialized groups -- a SGM session for newcomers, a group exploring simple living and another focused on meditation practice -- are examples of the ways in which we wish to expand Small Groups Ministry to meet the needs of a growing congregation.

Spiritual Development: We have a lively and creative Adult Programs Committee, which took time this past summer to study resources on adult programs and spiritual formation and then developed a mission statement for its work. This allows the Committee to plan adult classes that closely serve the mission statement of USNH as a whole. Classes this year have focused on developing or honing spiritual practice (meditation and yoga); applying our spiritual values to our work in the world (social justice and parenting focuses); and Unitarian Universalist identity. All of these opportunities bring more of our members into the Small Groups environment. The Program Minister will assist and support this committee as it expands these offerings.

Spiritual Retreats: This spring we will host a day-long spiritual retreat led by our senior minister, designed to help participants explore the nature of their gifts and their ministry (both inside and outside of the USNH circle). Expansion of this initiative in the future will include retreats with different emphases: as a pathway of spiritual exploration for newcomers; an intergenerational opportunity for children and adults to explore elements of worship and spiritual practice together; and as a way for established members to discern their gifts and choose their avenues of service as a ministry.

Seekers Programs: We are excited by the prospect of developing opportunities similar to those offered in more traditional Christian congregations as "Seekers Programs", tailored for those who are in search of a spiritual home but who are unfamiliar with Unitarian Universalism. We would like to hold two day-long spiritual retreats each year specifically to introduce the rich possibilities of Unitarian Universalism to seekers in our area who are new to our faith. One of these will be tailored specifically to the young adult population, a growing part of New Haven's demographic.

Additional Worship Services: This fall we initiated "Soul and Sociability", a vespers service and shared meal every third Friday. This new worship service has proven to us that additional forms of worship attract new people as well as many established members. One of our intended areas of program expansion is to offer our vespers services every week. In addition we intend to experiment with Family Worship services on regular Sundays throughout the congregational year which will be fully intergenerational and offer young families the opportunity to worship together.

Social Justice Ministry. USNH is deeply engaged in the greater New Haven area and state-wide through our social justice ministries. In addition to creating avenues for our members to live out the values of our faith, these ministries have also become entry points for newcomers to our congregation. Because these social justice ministries are central to our congregational purpose, we expect them to expand with the assistance of a Program Minister. Our justice focuses include the USNH-Waverly Partnership, the Transformation Team and other anti-racism work, GLBT equal rights and other initiatives (a brief description of our most vibrant social justice ministries is attached to this proposal).

Year Three: Children and Youth Religious Education Program

Part-time Youth Coordinator and Full-time Administrative Assistant for Religious Education: At the heart of every vibrant congregation is its religious education program for children and youth. At USNH we have learned that the most effective RE programs are those which focus not only on the classroom experience of our children but on the ways in which we strengthen and sustain families, and assist parents in the complex task of raising spiritually mature and morally aware children.

In fiscal year 2004-05 we expect to continue to serve our children, youth and parents with a full-time Director of Religious Education and a part-time RE Administrative

Assistant. But it is clear to us by our current growth trends that young families will comprise a growing percentage of those who choose to join us. We therefore anticipate the need to expand our administrative assistance for our DRE to full-time and add a coordinator for our YRUU program by the third year of our Partnership for Growth. This assistance will allow our RE Director to focus on an expansion of programs dedicated to the support of our families.

Year Four: Consolidation and Collaboration

In the fourth year of our Partnership for Growth with the UUA we do not anticipate further expansion of our staff. Instead we will focus on strengthening the program expansions already undertaken and consolidating the data we have collected in order to assist other congregations in replicating this model.

As outlined in our summary pages, we anticipate a close collaboration throughout the years of the Partnership for Growth with the four other largest congregations in the Clara Barton District. We plan 'constituency meetings' from the beginning of this pilot project in which various groups from within all five congregations will gather to test out our programs as they develop, share them with one another and collaborate in collecting data and measuring the success of our efforts. For instance, the Membership Committees of all five congregations will gather to share strategies; at another time the governing boards will meet to explore new structures as we move into the larger size; and so on.

In the fourth year of the Partnership for Growth we expect the gathered experience of these congregations to be systematized in a form that will be useful well beyond our district, potentially to congregations of any size which are interested in serving their communities more broadly and effectively. Several different staff members will be involved in this process and will continue to serve the UUA in subsequent years by bringing our experience and programs to other congregations around the country.

Funding the Partnership for Growth

In order to simply maintain current staff and program levels and assume our new mortgage, the USNH operating budget has increased by more than 15% in the past two years. *This increase comes on top of the more than \$1.5 million our members gave to our capital campaign.* Despite the stretch, we are confident that we will meet the continuing challenge of our larger budget needs through increased pledges, aggressive marketing for rentals and various fundraising activities.

It is important to note that the strategic investment we seek through the Partnership for Growth is above and beyond our anticipated operating budget of over \$500,000 which we will raise for ourselves. It is sought in order to enable our *expansion* of programs and staff to meet the growth that our vision and our new sanctuary now invite.

To this end, USNH is seeking \$300,000 total over the four years of the Partnership for Growth, above and beyond our regular operating needs. We intend to approach three sources for these funds:

-- Major donors within USNH. These are dedicated members who have already contributed with enormous generosity to the construction of our new sanctuary and who continue to increase their support annually through their pledges. We believe these generous givers will respond enthusiastically to a Partnership for Growth with the UUA, in which USNH has the opportunity to be the "test case" for rapid and sustained growth. Our goal is twenty donors willing to contribute \$5,000, for a total of \$100,000.

-- Individual donors outside of our congregation, who wish to contribute to the growth of Unitarian Universalism in the Clara Barton District. These might be members of other congregations who are also "Friends of the UUA" and have a demonstrated commitment to our denomination beyond their own churches. They may be individual Unitarian Universalists living in areas in which there is no active UU congregation. Denominational assistance would be required in order to identify and approach these donors. Our goal is ten donors willing to contribute \$5,000 for a total of \$50,000.

-- UU institutions, including the Unitarian Universalist Association, reflecting its commitment to the growth of our denomination. Over the four-year period of this Partnership we are seeking \$150,000 total from the UUA and other UU institutional sources to match the funds generated within our congregation and the district. We anticipate that these funds will be drawn from such sources as the recently completed Capital Campaign or grant monies designated through the Office for Young Adult and Campus Outreach. We also hope to draw a portion of this institutional support from the UU Funding Program's Fund for Unitarian Universalism.

Supporting Documents (attached):

- 1) Outline of new "Staffing for Growth" with division of costs between USNH and monies from the Partnership for Growth
- 2) USNH budgets for the past two years and projected budget for fiscal year 2004-05 (budget figures are separate from projected costs of Partnership for Growth)
- 3) Listing of current USNH social justice commitments
- 4) One-page summaries of support and participation from the other four largest Clara Barton congregations
- 5) January '04 article from the Hartford Courant on the rapid influx of young adults resettling in the greater New Haven area.

New Staffing to Support the Partnership for Growth

Funding Share	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Four Year Totals, Staffing for Growth
Membership Coordinator					
USNH	-0-	\$17,166	\$35,364	\$54,636	\$107,166
Partnership Support	\$50,000	34,334	17,681	-0-	102,015
Total:	\$50,000	\$51,500	\$53,045	\$54,636	\$209,181
Program Minister					
USNH	-0-	-0-	\$25,750	\$53,050	\$ 78,800
Partnership Support	-0-	\$75,000	51,500	26,550	153,050
Total:	-0-	\$75,000	\$77,250	\$79,570	\$231,820
RE Admin. Assistant					
USNH	\$11,900	\$12,300	\$11,600	\$24,033	\$ 59,833
Partnership Support	-0-	-0-	23,400	12,000	35,400
Total:	\$11,900	\$12,300	\$35,000	\$36,033	\$ 95,233
Youth Coordinator					
USNH	-0-	-0-	\$ 3,000	\$ 7,300	\$10,300
Partnership Support	-0-	-0-	7,000	3,000	10,000
Total:			\$10,000	\$10,300	\$23,000

Assumptions:

- 1) 3% Cost of Living increases annually for each position
- 2) USNH assumption of new position cost increases by 1/3 each year; by year five, total cost of all positions carried fully by USNH.

**The Unitarian Society of New Haven
Budgets for 2002-04 and Projected Budget 2004-05**

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Income			
Pledges	320,366	365,000	434,350
Collection Plate	11,873	12,000	12,360
Rentals	64,880	43,000	53,900
Other Income	60,814	38,700	39,861
Fill the Gap Fund		33,280	
Capital Campaign Seed Money		11,000	
Total	456,933	502,980	542,471
Expenses			
Personnel Costs	292,253	313,444	322,847
Building & Grounds	31,000	37,375	41,112
Denom. Affairs (Dues)	22,481	16,280	20,923
Religious Education	11,800	9,200	9,476
Office	25,264	26,964	27,772
Finance	7,150	61,400	81,070
Communications	2,000	2,000	2,060
Music	4,550	4,986	5,135
Social Action	22,093	14,803	15,247
Committees	17,330	16,090	16,090
Capital Exp	13,000	0	0
Total	448,921	502,542	541,732

Income Assumptions:

- a) 19% increase in pledges for 04-05 due to increase in new members and current members pledge amounts
- b) 30% increase in rentals for 04-05 due to available long term rental space
- c) 3% increase for Plate Collection and Other Income

Expense Assumptions:

- a) 10% increase per year, Building and Grounds
- b) USNH is deeply committed to being a 'Fair Share' congregation, which we have demonstrated for the five years prior to 2003-04, when our costs for new construction presented new challenges. In 2003-04 we are paying 72%; we are committed to an increase to 80% in 2004-05 and anticipate a return to "Fair Share" by the following year.
- c) Finance committee costs include loans, mortgage & building insurance. No loan or mortgage in 2002-3
- d) \$6160 mortgage per month, started Dec, 03.
- e) 3% increase per year for all other expenses

Current USNH Staff:

The projected 2004-05 budget above assumes only a continuation of current staff positions with a 3% increase. Our anticipated new staff positions through the Partnership for Growth are not included on this page. Current and continuing staff positions include the following:

Full-time: Senior Minister, Director of Religious Education, Administrative Coordinator

Part-time: Music Director, Assistant Music Director, Office Assistant., Bookkeeper, RE Administrative Assistant, and a 3/4-time Sexton.

USNH Social Justice Ministries

-- **The USNH-Waverly Townhouse Partnership:** We believe our nine-year partnership with the tenants of the Waverly Townhouses is unique among UU congregations. Based on an empowerment model of community development, USNH has aided the residents of this housing project in forming themselves into a nonprofit association with a significant voice in their own future. Dozens of USNH members contribute their time and talent through the tutoring and enrichment programs we initiated to serve Waverly children and youth. A significant number of these youth have grown into mentors in their own right.

-- **Anti-racism:** USNH formed one of the denomination's first Transformation Teams. The team has completed a series of anti-racism training sessions for our Board of Trustees, our leadership teams, our religious education program and our membership at large. They continue their work through study circles, worship services and an enormously successful inter-racial dialogue between members of a local mosque and USNH members.

-- **GLBT Equal Rights:** USNH has been on the cutting edge of the struggle in Connecticut for equal marriage rights for gay, lesbian and transgender people. USNH became a Welcoming Congregation twelve years ago, and in 2000 joined the coalition Love Makes a Family in the successful effort to extend the right of adoption to gay and lesbian parents. As the election year unfolds gay marriage has become a "battleground" issue in which our congregation is deeply engaged.

-- **Community-Based Organizing:** USNH is a dues-paying member of Elm City Congregations Organized (ECCO), a local coalition of over twenty congregations engaged in leadership development and organizing, particularly around labor struggles and low-income housing in New Haven.

-- **Peacemaking:** Our Senior Minister is a founding member of a Connecticut interfaith group, Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice, born of the need to give voice to the imperatives of peace during a time of war. Many USNH members have become active in this organization, in activities ranging from study groups and nonviolence training to protest and civil disobedience.

-- **Green Sanctuary:** A committed group within the congregation began a Green Sanctuary initiative two years ago to move our congregation nearer to practices within our walls that reflect our ecological awareness and commitments. In May of this year we will host a full-day workshop open to other area congregations to further the work of this task force.

The First Unitarian Church of Worcester

Who We Are

The First Unitarian Church of Worcester is a larger mid-size church, located downtown in Worcester. Three hundred plus children and adults attend on Sunday, for worship and religious education in our beautifully renovated facility. The generous and growing congregation has been making extensive investments in preparing the ground for growth, and is eager to share the opportunities for spiritual development, exciting religious education and community service. We receive a steady stream of visitors to our Sunday services and our reputation for high quality worship is excellent. Our budget is approximately \$600,000 per year.

Our steps Toward Growth

- Growth became a stated goal in the 1998-1999 church year. .
- The call of an Associate Minister in 1999 was “the decision for growth,” a conscious investment in staffing for growth
- Year 1999-2000 saw formation of Growth and Retention Task Force which developed strategies and tactics for growth.
- Through a church-wide discussion process, the congregation adopted a Mission and Values statement in 2000 that enlivened our sense of our selves and our mission.
- The church suffered a church fire in June of 2000. The damage particularly limited our religious education space. The Rebuilding effort was long and expensive and disruptive to the efforts toward growth for 2-3 years,
- Despite the fire, there was a consistent increase in programming over the last 4 years.
 - Formation of covenant groups in 2002.
 - Transition of interest based covenant groups into more permanent organizations in 2003 and 2004.
 - Today a large number of small groups are active in the church.
- First Unitarian has been increasing the opportunities for different worship experiences.
 - Two series of experimental Sunday evening worship services.
 - Covenant Groups have become responsible for Summer Lay Led services, resulting in greater participation, variety and attendance.
 - New Worship traditions include a family oriented participatory pageant as a second Christmas Eve Service, a Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae service, a returning college-age young adult service after Christmas.
 - Planning for a second Sunday service, an early “Centering Service” for Fall, 2004.
- During the 2002-2003-2004 years, the Governance Structure was revised to make the church more open, democratic and transparent and more capable of implementing its mission.
 - The Governing Board (The Prudential Committee) was streamlined by removing most standing committee chairs.
 - An elected Lay Leadership Council has been formed to be responsible for the programmatic work of the congregation.
 - Multi-candidate elections have been held for both the Nominating Committee and the Lay Leadership Council.

The fire is behind us now, and we are now poised, committed and organized for growth.

Why we support the Partnership for Growth

- We need partners, and are excited about forming a learning community with similarly situated congregations to learn together how to grow our church.
- We believe that the greatest opportunity for the growth of Unitarian Universalism is by growing healthy and successful congregations into larger, healthier and more successful religious communities. We believe that such congregations are the greatest resource for each other, that by sharing best practices, by bringing fresh eyes to situations that seem stuck, by mutual encouragement, inspiration and accountability congregations can help each other overcome the obstacles to growth.

We believe that if we can develop a model of a Partnership for Growth in the Clara Barton District among the larger churches, this model can be replicated elsewhere, in other districts and other size ranges of churches.

The Universalist Church of West Hartford, CT

Who we are

The Universalist Church of West Hartford, founded in 1821, is a vibrant, dynamic congregation committed to sharing our Unitarian Universalist faith with all who hunger and thirst for this saving message of hope. We are a growing congregation of over 600 adult members and nearly 300 children and youth. The total budget for 2003-04 is expected to be just over \$665,000. Served by visionary lay leadership, the congregation has taken specific steps toward continued growth and is now poised for expansive growth over the next decade.

Steps Toward Growth

- In early 2002, we began offering two Sunday morning services increasing overall attendance by about 20%.
- During our search for a new Senior Minister, we determined that we needed a Senior Minister who is both comfortable with the large church model and committed to growth. With the encouragement of leadership, our Senior Minister has cast an expansive vision for the congregation's future generating enthusiasm, new ideas for outreach and a renewed sense of mission within the congregation. We will soon form a Strategic Planning Committee.
- We have embraced our identity as a large church. For the past two years, Stefan Jonasson has led retreats for leadership focused on mission, vision and growth. Stefan will preach at both services on a Sunday in early 2005 and lead a congregational "town meeting."
- We are streamlining our governance. Our Governance Task Force began work in 2003 and is expected to present a policy governance model for congregational approval in April 2004 to be formally implemented in 2005.
- We have taken steps to "get right" with money and fund our vision for the future. The 2003-04 canvass was up 17%, and was the highest total canvass ever.
- We are increasing our program staff. After the retirement of Jean Cook Brown as our MRE, we hired a Director of Religious Education. Jean now serves half time as our Minister for Pastoral Care. Continuing the tradition of our strong ministry to high school youth, we expect to hire a Middle School Youth Director next year and form a middle school youth group. Within the next five years, we plan to increase program staff further with the addition of a full time Program Minister, a half time Coordinator of Member Services and a half time Director of Adult Education.
- Our newly formed Hospitality Ministry Team is looking for the best ways to turn our many visitors into members and to retain them for the long term.

Why we support the Partnership for Growth

- We want to grow more large congregations. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the larger midsize congregations in the Clara Barton District to share what we have learned and to help them become large congregations.
- We are on a path of growth and want to learn from USNH and others how best to keep growing. We welcome the opportunity for our leaders to share "best practices" with the leaders of other congregations also on the path of growth.
- We believe that the Partnership for Growth is a model that can be replicated in other areas to help grow Unitarian Universalism.

The Unitarian Society of Hartford

Who we are:

The Unitarian Society of Hartford is a growing congregation of approximately 400 adults and 200 children. Founded in 1842, the "Meeting House" (as it is known) attracts its membership from a large, and newly invigorated, metropolitan area. In the last three and a half years the congregation has undergone an intensive mission/vision, strategic planning process of self-definition. Out of this process a number of initiatives have emerged that position us well for new growth.

Strategic Initiatives:

- ❖ The congregation recently adopted a dramatically different governance structure designed to eliminate previous bureaucratic layers and delays in decision-making processes, and to encourage the evolution of new and responsive ministries within the congregation. Our new structure can be viewed at our website at USHartford.com.
- ❖ Two and a half years ago the congregation added an additional Assistant Minister position designed to respond to the growing needs of our children's program as well as to begin to move the congregation toward a truly lifespan understanding of faith development. Now staffed by an Interim Minister, the program is ideally situated to attract new families.
- ❖ Over the last five years, USH has developed an extensive adult education program including a small group ministry component in which over 200 members have participated. The program is now shaped by a "Core Curriculum" designed around the new mission of the congregation, and focuses on the needs not only of current members, but of potential members as well.
- ❖ Recognizing that staff support was sorely lacking in the past, we are now well staffed not only by our ministry team, but also by a full-time Business Manager, a part-time Administrative Assistant, an RE assistant, a sexton, a custodian, a Music Director, Organist, Children's Choir Director and a security guard. We are now situated to meet the needs of a growing mid-size congregation, but know we would be stretched to staff for greater growth.
- ❖ Our recently invigorated Membership Committee has launched a "Welcome Team" program in which over fifty members of the congregation were trained specifically in how to be welcoming to visitors to the Meeting House.
- ❖ A Building Usage Task Force was recently established to evaluate our building's ability to meet not only our current needs but also future needs in growth. A key component of this evaluation is addressing the crowded conditions of our sanctuary and classrooms and making recommendations for future program changes (such as moving to two services) as well as potential capital campaign endeavors.

The leadership of USH has not had an opportunity to officially vote on this proposal, but in speaking with key leaders about its potential, I have heard only enthusiastic endorsement, for it fits so well with our strategic initiatives for growth. We do not wish to do this alone, but to learn and grow with other UU congregations in our area.

The Unitarian Society of Northampton & Florence (USNF)

Who we are: Having been overtaken by unplanned growth during the 1990s, USNF recognizes the central importance of intentionality and planning. The seven members of the Executive Team have endorsed this proposal for collaborative growth and wish to participate in this new model of partnership

USNF's membership is now close to 475, following a time of transition that began with the departure of Rev. Victoria Safford in the Spring of 1998. During her decade of ministry here, both membership and attendance soared. But our congregation had developed no plan and no intentional vision of growth in numbers, programming, financial strength, or effectiveness. We learned a great deal from this 'boom' of the nineties. We now know from experience that a small, almost-rural community can support a large Unitarian Universalist congregation (Northampton's population is about 31,000, and, with the exception of Amherst, seven miles to the East, surrounding towns are overwhelmingly rural).

Strategic Initiatives and Challenges: Our transitional period now appears to be over, and the inflow of new members has begun to exceed attrition. But we still face several obstacles to our growth. The most serious is building space: we are landlocked between three buildings in the City Hall complex. Others include stewardship, public relations, membership growth and assimilation, and programming. Further, a troubled economy has made our financial situation more difficult, despite growth in member financial commitment. In the Partnership for Growth model, we see great potential for learning and for structural and attitudinal change, to be realized through mutual sharing and accountability, discipline, UUA assistance, and collegial cooperation. We see this as an occasion for breakthrough.

The current minister, Rev. Jay Deacon, earned a Doctor of Ministry at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, with additional studies at The Hartford Seminary Foundation. He understands the dynamics and variables in congregational revitalization. But he knows, too, the importance of lay participation and ownership in identifying a congregation's mission and vision, and in taking hold of congregational life in a transformative way. USNF's talented leadership is ready for the challenge.

With the introduction of this partnership dimension between the five congregations and the Association, we envision a quantum leap in our effectiveness. The proposal has been shared with our Board of Directors; we anticipate eagerly drawing the entire congregation into the process as both a vision and a plan emerge. We are very excited about the prospect of working closely with the four other congregations.