

Only the narrative portions of this \$14,000 award-winning grant proposal are shown.

What are your plans and goals for the next five years with respect to:

a) Membership b) Programs c) Facilities d) Finances

a) **Membership**—All Souls' membership growth goal over the next five years is to increase our adult membership by at least 100 members to achieve a membership of approximately 250, with the related goal of increasing member retention. Our aim is to steadily progress toward being a full service congregation as our membership increases.

b) **Programs**—Our 2006–2008 Strategic Plan calls for us to be a fully funded program church by the end of 2008. This goal means continuing our strong development of the Religious Education program (largely achieved during 2006) and establishing and maintaining vital music and adult education programming (2007–2008). Other program goals include the continued work of the Newcomers and Community Life Program Boards and the establishment of a Membership Board. Five-year program goals include continuing to grow and modify our programs to meet our members' needs as the church expands.

c) **Facilities**—All Souls currently rents space and will continue to rent for at least two more years. Our capital campaign is tentatively scheduled for 2010 or 2011, and within six to seven years we plan to purchase a building or purchase land on which to build.

d) **Finances**—Financial goals include increasing total annual income by 10% per year so that by 2012 our income would be approximately \$236,300. Expenses during this time are expected to rise proportionately. A related goal is to increase the percentage of the congregation that pledges.

What specific actions are you going to take to reach those goals?

a) **Membership**—As described in the Membership Growth Plan created for All Souls' application to the UUA's Forward Through the Ages Stewardship Development Program (FORTH), our strategies for attracting new members and retaining current ones involve improving adult education; embracing newcomers; fostering church leaders; promoting the church both internally and externally; and developing the worship service. The first two strategies, adult education and embracing newcomers, are discussed under "b) Programs" immediately following this section. The establishment of a Membership Board is also discussed below.

Because competent, flexible, and responsible church leadership is fundamental to our members' confidence in the church and its future, All Souls is committed to fostering church leaders through training and mentoring. We recently held our first orientation for new Board of Trustees members, for example, and our members regularly attend training both through the Heartland District and General Assembly. All Souls seeks to increase the sense of "ownership" across a broad section of the congregation by encouraging leadership roles among all ages.

Promoting the church both internally and externally is an on-going, multifaceted

communications project. These goals are addressed separately and in detail in our Strategic Plan. Briefly, our strategies include redesigning the website to include internal as well as external communication so that both members and site visitors will be able to learn about All Souls in a user-friendly context; redesigning our electronic newsletter, *The Weekly Expression*, to be the launching point for all internal communications (with links to the website and calendar); and increasing the lobby presence of Program Boards', Board of Trustees', and small groups' activities. To promote ourselves more effectively in the greater Grand Rapids community, All Souls plans to diversify its print ad content and placement and to take advantage of the UUA "Uncommon Denomination" research and suggestions to ascertain which practices would be most beneficial to raising awareness of Unitarian Universalism and All Souls Community Church in our area. We are also seeking ways to encourage all our members to speak about liberal religion and our faith tradition.

The worship service remains at the heart of the congregation's spiritual life and as such is of vital significance to attracting and retaining members. The music program, in turn, is vital to the success of the worship service. In spite of a dedicated Music Board and willing singers and instrumentalists, All Souls has been criticized for the poor quality of its music program. We don't want to take five years to address this problem: we strongly believe that continuing to greet our members and visitors with lackluster music will contribute to our high turnover rate and dissatisfaction among the congregation. Thus, the Chalice Lighters funds would be put to immediate and pragmatic use once All Souls can find and hire a suitable music director.

b) **Programs**—Each of the six Program Boards at All Souls Community Church of West Michigan offers programming for specific purposes and participants. All programming seeks to fulfill the established mission of All Souls to liberate and cultivate the human spirit. Specific Program Board five-year plans include:

- **Music**—At present All Souls has a nine-member adult choir; the Music Board plans to add at least one or two additional singers. The choir sings only twice a month, and six to eight instrumentalists play about once a month. Instrumentalists join the choir about once per month. All Souls has a paid pianist for 45 weeks per year. This Board plans to establish a children's choir to sing four to six times per year and would also like to start a handbell choir. One high school instrumentalist has recently been recruited to join All Souls' talented pool of musicians, and the Music Board will continue its efforts to attract our younger members.

In short, All Souls Community Church of West Michigan is poised to develop its music program to provide the entire congregation and our visitors and friends with an uplifting and joyful part of our worship service. We are confident that with the help of a Chalice Lighters grant that we will reach the goal of hiring a music director who will contribute to our ability to encourage repeat visitors and grow our congregation.

- **Covenant**—The purpose of the Covenant Board is to provide small, safe, stable groups that encourage members to walk together in spiritual exploration. Plans for this Board include continuing to establish new Branches groups as frequently as possible (that is, when there are enough new members to start a group) and to explore the possibilities of other types of covenanted groups so that more church members can experience the close relationships that small groups provide.

- **Community Life**—Goals for Community Life include maintaining a full Board and continuing to establish an annual calendar of activities that will appeal to a variety of interests and ages. Specific tactics include offering training and support to volunteers; setting up intergenerational activities; and exploring possibilities for interest-specific activities.
- **Adult Religious Education**—The immediate and long-term goals of this Board are to provide thought-provoking programming both for members of All Souls and the greater Grand Rapids community. The Adult RE Board plans to continue the Mid-Winter Lecture Series begun in 2005 and to expand its program to offer one-time or lecture/discussion series throughout the year.
- **Children’s Religious Education**—The Religious Education Board, with the assistance of a part-time Religious Education Coordinator, has worked diligently and successfully to establish an effective RE program for our children. To enhance this success, the Board plans to continue to research Unitarian Universalist–focused K–8 curricula that are reasonably easy for volunteers to teach and that will provide two to three years of nonrepeating material for each grade range; recruit volunteers to develop and lead our high school program; and offer regular training for Religious Education volunteers.
- **Newcomers**—In 2006–2007 the Newcomers Board developed a detailed systems flow that addresses the needs and concerns of our visitors from the time they walk in the front door until they become members. The challenge for Newcomers is to attract and train enough volunteers to fully implement this plan to transform first-time visitors to repeat visitors and repeat visitors to members.
- **Membership**—All Souls plans to establish a Membership Board within the next two years. The Membership Board will be responsible for maintaining contact with new members and helping them to connect with small groups and volunteer opportunities within the church; will keep membership records current; and will contact established members every 1 to 2 years to assess members’ levels of satisfaction and involvement with the church.

c) **Facilities**—Our Strategic Plan calls for a capital campaign for either a building or land on which to build by 2010. This date may change as a result of the long-range planning the Board of Trustees and Stewardship Committee is currently undertaking as part of the Forward Through the Ages project with UUA consultant Larry Wheeler. Assuming a modest rate of return of 5% per year, we expect our capital fund of \$76,400 to appreciate to approximately \$88,500 by the end of 2010, which would give us a solid foundation for a capital campaign to provide All Souls with our own facilities.

d) **Finances**—All Souls’ strategies for achieving our financial goals, as specified in the Strategic Plan, include engaging the services of a UUA fundraising consultant, establishing more intentional and focused fund-raising procedures, and evaluating the effectiveness of our various fund-raising activities, both financially and in their ability to foster a sense of community and shared purpose in the congregation. Our financial goals are closely integrated with the stewardship goals described in the multi-year plan

and will be directed by our participation in the Forward Through the Ages Stewardship Development Program.

Multi-Year Work Plan

All Souls Community Church of West Michigan is one of seven churches chosen to participate in Forward Through the Ages (FORTH), the test stewardship and church development program of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Beginning in the spring of 2007, FORTH consultant Larry Wheeler will be available to work with All Souls for a total of three years. Thus, while we will continue to implement and add to our 2006–2008 Strategic Plan, we will also be hard at work participating in this pilot program. We are pleased and excited to be part of FORTH and are confident that our participation will benefit not only a growth in membership but a growth in our ability to be a full service church with active, vital programs and ministry for our members and the greater Grand Rapids and West Michigan community.

Our Strategic Plan focuses on four key areas necessary to the growth of All Souls: finances, programs, internal communication, and external communication. The goals of the Strategic Plan regarding finances have been subsumed under FORTH, and programming goals are discussed above. The two remaining areas are truly multi-year because we conceive of them as on-going endeavors that are critical to promoting and publicizing our mission to liberate and cultivate the human spirit in West Michigan. The major goal of internal communication is to establish and maintain an effective, multimedia system for members, friends, and visitors concerning the mission, operation, and activities of the church. Over the next two years our objectives include improving the reach and scope of internal communication and encouraging every member and friend to use all available means of communication to familiarize themselves with the work and activities of the church. These include the website (calendar, downloadable sermon podcasts, online forums, and static content, e.g., Board of Trustees' and Program Boards' meeting minutes and bylaws); the *Weekly Expression* (with links to the website and other sites of interest); and a strong lobby presence for the Board of Trustees and Program Boards. In other words, we not only plan to redesign the website and our electronic newsletter and make better use of the lobby and worship service as loci of communication, but we also plan to continue to remind people to use these media.

In addition to the external communication objectives discussed under "Membership," All Souls plans to promote our presence and raise awareness of Unitarian Universalism in the greater Grand Rapids area by partnering with other institutions for social justice and community events. On November 19, 2007, for example, we will co-host Grand Rapids' annual Interfaith Thanksgiving with Congregation Ahavas. The following month (December 7, 2007) All Souls' popular annual Silent Auction will be held in conjunction with the Center for Healing Racism, an office of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce.

To ensure that All Souls' Strategic Plan is implemented without unnecessary delays, at our initial workshop with Larry Wheeler in June 2007 the Board of Trustees adopted a business-based implementation plan. This plan stresses the importance of clearly articulating underlying core values (in addition to the stated mission of the church); key capabilities and initiatives; and target goals at quarterly, annual, and five-year intervals. At inception and at least annually thereafter, the plan also calls for a SWOT analysis to help participants be aware of their organization's culture and possibilities. The

implementation plan also calls for All Souls' present Strategic Plan to be expanded to cover 2009–2014 and updated annually to provide a rolling five-year strategic plan.

All this activity will occur in conjunction with the Forward Through the Ages stewardship development program. We anticipate that the growth of our knowledge of congregational stewardship will strengthen not only All Souls' finances but will increase the bonds of our congregation as members and friends see how increased stewardship allows us to reinforce our programs, extend our ministries outside the church, and fulfill our mission of liberating and cultivating the human spirit. During the three-year FORTH program Larry Wheeler will work with All Souls to develop the five pillars of the stewardship development program: stewardship education, joyful giving, ministry and good works, the annual budget drive, and planned giving. At present we are in a "catch-up" phase as we are working to pull together Mr. Wheeler's suggestions for our annual budget drive, which for All Souls occurs in the fall. Mr. Wheeler is also working with our new stewardship committee and will offer two stewardship workshops in September. We anticipate being able to meet with Mr. Wheeler six to eight times per year as well as taking advantage of his expertise through conference calls.

But no amount of strategic planning, stewardship, programming, or determined good will can make up for weak or intermittent musical performances on Sunday morning, and nothing can as quickly draw together Sunday morning worshippers as the consistent expectation and enjoyment of well-executed music. All Souls Community Church of West Michigan asks for the assistance of a Chalice Lighters grant from the Heartland District not only to help grow our church but to put Unitarian Universalism on the map of West Michigan through hiring a music director who will help make music an anticipated, joyful, and integral part of our services and fellowship.