

Sacred Journey Fellowship Strategic Action Plan

Abstract

The enclosed strategic action plan for Sacred Journey Fellowship presents our vision, mission, values and principles, internal assessment, objectives, goals, strategies for goal attainment, and plans that execute those strategies by the end of the 2013-2014 church year.

- Mission - As an Earth-Centered Unitarian Universalist congregation, Sacred Journey Fellowship encourages one another to explore their personal potential As such:

We are a green organization and use our strengths in pursuit of a better world through community and environmental action.

We nurture one another's spiritual growth by providing sanctuary for personal discovery including expanding our knowledge and respect for faiths, traditions and/or philosophies that our members may choose to explore.

We celebrate the fullness and healing power of Nature of which we are all a part. This includes honoring the divine as having both feminine and masculine facets.

We raise awareness of Unitarian Universalist principles, including democratic decision-making, through active involvement in our shared ministry and the community at large.

- Vision – Sacred Journey Fellowship is where we:
 - Gather to honor the Sacred in a family-supportive environment
 - Respect diversity in belief and lifestyle
 - Provide a spiritual home and point of connection for those seeking to honor the Divine in any form
 - Reclaim and reintegrate Earth-Centered Spirituality and Paganism in order to restore these paths to their rightful places of dignity among the family of religious traditions

In so doing, we are a welcoming congregation

- Principles -
 - The inherent worth and dignity of every person
 - Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
 - Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
 - A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
 - The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
 - Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part
- Cornerstones -
 - Think well of the group
 - Think well of your self
 - Stewardship of self
 - Honor your Sacred Wounds
 - Make good choices

An in doing these, make yourself able to serve others

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats -

Strengths

- A core of active, dedicated and talented members
- Relatively young membership (¾'s 50 and under)
- Low operating expenses including a building that's nearly paid for
- Steady inflow of visitors and new members
- Gradually increasing non-pledge giving
- Strengths cont.
- Effective communications – web site, weekly email newsletter, email discussion lists
- A permanent location
- Minimal competition in formal Earth-Centered religious organizations
- Over 40 years of history as a religious organization

Weaknesses

- Very small congregation size
- Very small RE at present time, too few school aged children
- Limited organized community service
- Financial instability for some of membership contributes to transience as members move to seek employment
- Lack of pastoral resources
- Minimal saving – revenue shortfalls harm facility maintenance
- Low pledging – 90 % of member base pledges at less than \$50/month
- Weak UU Identification by much of membership
- Historical membership retention problems

Opportunities

- Garland campus of DCC opens less than 1 mile from SJF in Spring 2010. Community College is a good match for us economically and age-wise.
- Rental opportunities as we continue to improve our facility
- Explore student (and possibly eventually part-time) minister possibilities
- Potential of financing from NTAUUS and other cash flow opportunities, i.e. NTAUUS grants, Chalice Lighter grants, matching grants, endowments
- Current facilities holds modest expansion potential
- Partnering with other Earth-Centered UU congregations for cooperative program development and sharing of best practices
- Partnering with other Earth-Centered UU congregations for cooperative program development and sharing of best practices
- Experimenting with evening services to increase our accessibility to general Pagan population
- Improving our worship experience as an increasing cohort of members go through our ritual leader training program
- Expanding education offerings
- Opportunities cont.
- Greater community involvement through Pagan Pride Day. 1st Sunday plate donations, Solstice Celebrations and other community events.
- Membership growth bring about greater diversity of skills available to the congregations
- Outreach through technology

Threats

- Most congregational functions depend on a small handful of people
- Unknown risks and expenses of property ownership
- Historic behavior problems within congregation flare up and drive off members
- Failure to change organizational structure in accordance to changes in size
- Objective
- Sacred Journey Fellowship seeks to grow, become a more influential liberal earth-centered religious presence, and increase our service to our community and the world at large

Objectives - Sacred Journey Fellowship seeks to grow, become a more influential liberal earth-centered religious spiritual presence, and increase our service to our community and the world at large

Goals

Growth

1. Spiritual growth – increase educational and service offerings
2. Membership growth – reach at least 75 members by 2014

3. Financial growth – increase stability, investment, and giving
4. Physical growth – have a larger, better maintained facility

Liberal Earth-Centered Religious Presence

- Increase number of, effectiveness, and participation in our programs
- Increase visibility in the community

Increase Community Service

- Identify and adopt new community service programs
- Generate congregation-wide support of community service programs

Strategies and Plans of Execution

Improve quality and quantity of Worship Service(s)

Plan: Use Excellence in Ritual (EIR) students and graduates to improve Sunday services and to drive focus of services on team effort rather than individually performed services. Outreach to non-traditional audiences by holding services at times other than Sunday morning. Also, upgrade our audio-visual equipment so that Announcements, Chant/Song Words and the Order of Service can be projected onto a wall. Provide broadband Internet access so that streaming media can be used in service. Create printed resources for in-house worship resources.

Expand Adult Educational Opportunities

- Continue to expand our Adult Education program to become a true community resource to learn about various pagan traditions
- Create short one day workshops on topics the community at large wishes to know more about
- Offer workshops and / or classes that address the interests of LGBT, Feminist traditions and other specialty groups among us.

Explore UU Ministry Possibilities

Plan: Find potential student ministers who would be available for the 2009-10 church year. Candidates must be individuals who are comfortable being associated with an avowedly Pagan-themed UU Congregation. If member growth meets expected benchmarks, we expect to utilize Student Ministry for Years 1-3 for this long range plan. By year 4, once we are over 50 members we could move up to quarter-time professional ministry.

Plan: Determine costs of student ministry and solicit NTAUUS grants to underwrite the transition to the new cost structure

Partner with community social, and action groups

Plan: SJF increase participation with liberal spiritual community groups that share similar ideals – Ancient Traditions, Earth Rhythms / Moonlady events, AmTrad, TETA, Covenant of the Goddess and the North Texas section of CMA, PFLAG, Kitty Co., Good Samaritan, Interfaith Reliance and others.

Plan: Increase exposure to activism issues through 1st Sunday plate donation program. Issue activism should be driven by member time & effort, and be consistent with our Mission and Vision states as well as our UU principles

Invest in training lay staff

Plan: Invest in lay training for RE teachers, board members and chaplains

Plan: Throughout this plan period we need to send at least one board member a year to DBLE and one RE volunteer to a Renaissance module

Membership growth – reach at least 75 members by 2013/2014

Plan: Increase visibility of the congregation within the metroplex Pagan community Place fliers in metaphysical shops, become more actively involved in Pagan Pride Day, and other community events. Average 25% member net growth per year to achieve goal of 75+ members in 2014: 25 in 2009, 31 in 2010, 39 in 2011, 48 in 2012, 60 in 2013 and 75 in 2014

Innovative marketing practices supporting growth at SJF

Plan:

- Promote guest speakers through Dallas Observer, DMN weekend guide, Garland paper
- Maintain outdoor sign – seek funding for electrical work – 2009
- Refresh our current website with links to congregational social networking sites and increase overall presence on Internet with monthly listings on Moonlady and other liberal on line spiritual resources
- Get included on the Chamber of Commerce places of worship web site list

Explore proven UUA growth strategies, apply where applicable

Plan: Methodologies to get newcomers to involve and invest in the congregation should be actively sought and incorporated where applicable

Financial growth – increased generosity through abundance mentality

Plan: Finance committee and Board of Directors develop plan for increased financial stability through

- Goal to raise the median pledge unit contribution for current \$300 to \$425+
- Continue to fully pay UUA, district, NTAUUS dues
- Increase investments in lay training, outside speakers / part-time ministry
- Have three months operating expenses (\$3500-4500) in savings by 8/2010
- Early payoff mortgage in less than three years so that we can get loan to build a new larger Sanctuary

Transform from family-style congregation to fellowship

Plan: Establish committees of multiple people

Plan: Move away from “committee of the whole” style board meetings, also have the Church Board meeting on a day other than Sunday

NTAUUS grants where applicable

Plan: Board of Directors annually submit for grant money available through NTAUUS

Continue to grow Children's Religious Education program

Plan: Provide the kids RE program with access to district training and new curricula Understand that children's RE will grow as fast or faster than general membership. Make sure that there is a plan for future RE activities so these events can be publicized to the broader community

- Move from individual operated RE efforts to a committee structure during 2009/10. Consider part-time RE director by 2013
- Create high school age youth group that promotes UU principles
- Provide visible role(s) for kids in church services

Library Outreach

- Open our library to the public as a resource to the pagan community
- Continue to add volumes to our library to increase its value as a pagan community resource
- Advertise the hours of library will be open including during Drum Jam, before and after rituals / services / classes

Outreach to groups which we have something to offer

- College Students – Continue to work with Pagan Student Association at SMU. See to work with other groups at local colleges. Investigate forming one at the Garland campus of DCCC once it opens.
- Provide regular beginner classes (like Paganism 101) for the area Seeker community
- Provide Meet up groups for different sub-groups of the local Solitaire community
- Groups which we have something to offer cont.
- Provide information on UU kinds RE programs to parents in the Earth-centered community
- Provide LGBT outreach via Welcoming Congregation (and follow up) programming by 2010
-

Approach towards Rental Opportunities

Plan: Continue to work on improving building with its suitability as a rental facility for meetings, circles and handfastings/weddings

- Seek out vendors that provide services / goods to our community at large to rent our building
- Host vendor driven events that will benefit the community

Building Expansion

- Background: Our current sanctuary does not hold more than 35 people comfortably, and can not be easily expanded as all of its walls are load bearing. However, we do have space in the back to put a 42' x 30' building between the kitchen door and the covered concrete pad where we currently hold drum jams. Installing a concrete pad and 1260 sq ft metal building should provide us a bare-bones Sanctuary for less than \$40,000 and should be able to seat close to 100 people.
- Timing & Financing: If we meet our expectations of 25% membership growth per year and per member pledge growth, we anticipate paying off the current mortgage by mid-year 2011. This is viewed as a pre-requisite to approaching NTAUUS for a new mortgage to fund our expansion coupled with requests to SW District Chalice Lighters and an in-house capital campaign.
- A finished out Sanctuary with an attached ADA bathroom and a new HVAC system for the entire facility would probably cost in the neighborhood of \$65,000. If we receive about a combined \$10,000 from Chalice Lighters and NTAUUS in grants – then another \$15,000 from our own capital campaign, we should be able to get by with a 10 yr mortgage from NTAUUS for the remaining \$40,000.
- If the loan is at 6% (modestly above the current historically low rates) our monthly payments would be around \$450, something that we should, by then, be able to easily afford. Naturally, if there are significant changes in our growth in members and/or pledges this will affect the timing (and perhaps even feasibility) for expansions.
- Later: Should these growth expectations come to pass, shortly after this 5 yr plan has been completed we will either need to buy an adjoining property, or start a search for an entirely new

facility. Because of the limitation of our current facility, and the limited nature of parking at neighboring Mon-Fri businesses – it is difficult to see how, even with this expansion, that our facility would comfortably serve a congregation of over 100 members.

- Disclaimer: Significant changes in our rate of growth for either membership or pledges – will substantially effect the timing (and perhaps even feasibility) for this projected expansion.

Establish Lay Chaplaincy

Plan: Research, adapt and seek congregation approval for instituting a Lay Chaplaincy program based largely on the Canadian Unitarian Council program. This program may be put on hold at times when the congregation has a student or part-time minister, depending on whether the minister wishes to take on these roles for the congregation.

Address Behavioral Issues

Plan: We have recently adopted a Behavioral Covenant, now it is up to us to apply it with concerns for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole having priority over individual privilege. To the degree that seriously disruptive behavior compromises the health and / or appeal of the congregation, or even tarnish the image of the community at large, we will reflect an emphasis on family-friendly health and security. Additionally, in order to address issues before they become serious problems, we will also provide training in ritual etiquette and in conflict management / resolution. Through are outreach to parents, we will make provide parenting training