

First Unitarian Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Implementation in 2022 – Executive Summary

January 11, 2023



Introduction

In January 2022, the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque's congregation voted to adopt the Strategic Plan for 2022-2026 with five strategic directions: Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and Multiculturalism; Church for All Ages; Engagement and Connection; Welcoming Campus; and Social Justice.

As we are a church of ourselves, the Strategic Plan is only useful if we own it and use it to guide our actions. This year, the Board of Directors committed to gathering and sharing information quarterly about how staff and church groups are working to move us in these strategic directions. What follows is a sampling of major actions and themes of the year's work, with a focus on new developments rather than programs that continue a long, successful history. The board's full report with updates from throughout the year can be found here:

<https://uuabq.org/strategic-directions/>

Strategic Direction 1: Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and Multiculturalism

- **Programs:** Most visibly, our ministers and Music Director have redesigned Sunday liturgy to decenter white protestant norms. The ministers preached throughout the year on anti-racism and anti-oppression themes. Behind the scenes, they've reviewed church materials for unintentional bias, trained lay leaders, arranged for formal staff training, and shared the pulpit with members of non-dominant groups. The Religious Education program has incorporated these themes and is exploring further curriculum connections. Our music director has included more musicians of color in the lineup of guest musicians and collaborated with UU music professional Francisco Ruiz for his weekend residency at First Unitarian, which included introducing the UUA Spanish-language hymnal "La Voces de Camino."

Sermons directly about this strategic direction included:

- The 8th Principle (1/16)
 - Widening the Circle (2/13)
 - “Trans Kids Are the Image of God (5/8)
 - Trans Lives (7/17)
 - Learning from Islam (8/21)
 - Putting Our Bodies in the Way (10/23)
 - Wholeness in Beloved Community (12/4)
 - What’s So Bad About Being Woke? (12/11)
 - And a multicultural, interfaith service on 12/24
- **Reflection:** As noted in the Strategic Plan, becoming a multicultural church inevitably requires introspection before actions can be taken. The 8th Principle Explorations Task Force surveyed congregational groups and arranged for members to complete and receive training on the Intercultural Development Inventory. Groups throughout the church, from board committees to the Widening the Circle group to extended families engaged in study and reflection around the theme.

Strategic Direction 2: Church for All Ages

- **Programs:** The redesigned Sunday liturgy seeks to be completely multi-generational rather than including a distinct “time for all ages.” Children are welcome and included in the sanctuary throughout the service, and children’s religious education programming has been moved to the hour between services (10-11) to give families and volunteers the option to participate in all aspects of Sunday morning. The Religious Education program focuses on fostering relationships across generations, with a new philosophy and a new volunteer model, both of which emphasize shared experiences and community-building rather than traditional “classes.” The easing of COVID restrictions allowed the return of multi-generational programs like in-person UU Kids’ Camp.
- **Community:** Events such as PrideFest, a church night at the Isotopes and an all-church Halloween party brought together members of all ages. Groups such as After-School Tutoring and Family Promise reach into the wider community with programs that serve young people and engage youth in their efforts.

Strategic Direction 3: Engagement and Connection

From the Strategic Plan: Our ministry might start with our ministerial staff, but it doesn't end there. Ministering, or caring for each other, and deepening our relationships among our members was in the hearts of many people in our congregation. ... [L]et's build our skills around recovering from mistakes and repairing our relationships within our congregation, particularly as we take on difficult conversations around race, class, gender and all the other ways that our complex identities and unconscious biases play out in all our church systems and personal interactions.

- **Programs:** For groups like the Healthy Community Committee (HCC), the Membership Committee, the Caring Network, and Covenant groups, this strategic focus is at the heart of their work. In addition, the music program offered a wide variety of opportunities to participate. The HCC worked with Angela on a service about “How and When to Apologize.” Connections Sundays resumed in-person, and the church rolled out the Realm communications platform. Sermons directly addressing “skills around recovering from mistakes and repairing relationships” included:
 - Unintended Consequences (1/23)
 - How and When to Apologize (8/28)
 - Change Back! (11/30)
- **Reflection:** Many groups described a special attention to healthy engagement and connection among members as the congregation emerged from COVID. In many cases, work on this area dovetailed with anti-oppression efforts. For example, the People of Color group provided feedback to numerous groups that requested it; the Widening the Circle group sought and maintained connections with numerous groups and organized an event to share experience around racial justice work.

Strategic Direction 4: Welcoming Campus

- **Use of facilities:** We established an ongoing campus-sharing arrangement with Albuquerque Center for Spiritual Living and Minara Muslim Community. In addition, the church hosted the Roots Summer Leadership Academy, the One New Mexico Gospel Choir event, a bilingual “Sol y Canto” coffee-house concert and vocal workshops, worship and concert by artist-in-residence Francisco Ruiz. The lease of the Arc building to Vanguard Behavioral Health is in line with the church's mission and is intended to support work on a campus master plan. While maintenance is an ongoing challenge,

staff and volunteers on Landscape and Buildings and Grounds committees have ensured that our campus remains a welcoming resource.

- **Programs and reflection:** In a number of areas, changes have been made this year to support inclusivity. For example, the redesigned liturgy specifically incorporates welcoming practices, such as explicitly naming accessibility and multigenerational inclusion when sharing invitations with the congregation, and the Personnel Committee has changed recruitment materials to incorporate inclusive language.

Strategic Direction 5: Social Justice

From the Strategic Plan: This strategic direction is intentionally listed last ... as energy and effort first needs to go toward our internal work to become more aware of the ways that we harbor implicit bias personally and center whiteness institutionally and build skills around cultural humility and repair after inevitable mistakes and misunderstandings. Similarly, we need to do the work to integrate all ages into all we do as a church before expecting our youth to embrace partnering with us and stepping up to be leaders in our social justice efforts.

- **Ongoing programs:** First Unitarian's social justice efforts include the food pantry, citizenship classes, tutoring for our neighborhood's children, English as a Second Language program, addiction recovery ministry, and Family Promise. Along with those listed under Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression and Multiculturalism above, sermons explicitly addressing justice issues in 2022 included:
 - When the Dead Refuse to Stay Down (Easter)
 - Men at War (5/29)
 - Healing the Heart of Democracy (7/3)
 - To Whom Does Our Work Belong (9/4)
 - Putting Our Bodies in the Way (10/23)
 - Connections that Heal: Partnering for a Just Transition (10/30)
- **Safe Outdoor Space:** As a response to the unhoused emergency in Albuquerque, the City legalized the operation of Safe Outdoor Spaces. These are supervised spaces where unhoused folks can set up tents or park their cars. First Unitarian has applied to operate protected overnight parking for ten cars in the Vanguard Building parking lot. The church is waiting to hear if their application has been approved.

