

VISIONS FROM THE 2010 UUCO RETREAT
November 2010

Autobiographical Poem — UUCO

I am UUCO,
Born of free-thinking people across the ages,
and my founding mothers, and the Union.
I bring clarity to a chaotic world
through my principles.
I voraciously consume
ideas and actions.
Sometimes I am a panther, quiet and watching;
sometimes an eagle, seeing miles away.
I passionately love justice
and the hope of a better future.
Remember me as the free church of the free people,
seeing farther than any can see.

THE RETREAT VISION STATEMENT —

We, UUCO, will be a community that will live its beliefs through:

- .1. Meaningful and organized social action**
- .2. Programming and small groups that provide opportunities for spiritual education, religious education, intellectual growth and philosophical growth**
- .3. Fun**
- .4. Having facilities that meet our needs**
- .5. A clear UU identity — personally, congregationally and in the community at large — expressed both verbally and through our actions,**
- .6. Shared leadership.**

.1. meaningful and organized social action

have a quarterly informational service with an action connection involving multiple people

have a social justice audit of our congregation

have small groups like book groups that study social justice issues

a number of other ideas were brought up

*** We have a Community and Justice Committee reconstituted

Resources needed: people power

.2. programming and small groups that provide opportunities for spiritual education, religious education, intellectual growth and philosophical growth

restructure services to include more discussion

develop small groups of ca. 6 people to focus on a topic for 6 months to a year

pick one theme a quarter to be an action topic

Resources needed: leaders to develop these possibilities

Sunday Services committee can consider some issues

.3. fun

have regular social activities

establish a fun committee by the end of 2010

post a birthday calendar by the end of 2010

have quarterly activities (potlucks, game nights, canoe trips) planned by the end of January 2011

establish a book exchange

allocate space and solicit initial donations

have a multi-purpose building

Resources needed: leaders to develop these possibilities

.4. having facilities that meet our needs

a second building

present the case for need and the financial consequences at a January 2011

service

collect feedback from congregation; have Town Hall discussions if necessary

have Board decide in March/April 2011

if NO, revisit issue annually

if YES, collect bids and assemble financing by early summer

have building standing by end of 2011

have interior finished by end of 2012

have exterior / covered walkway, etc. finished by end of 2013

improved landscaping

following building decision, have plan finished by end of 2012
have landscaping implemented by end of 2013
renovation of current building
following building decision, have plan finished by end of 2012
expand kitchen into adjacent room; extend sanctuary into front rooms; new vestibule by end of 2013

Resources needed: ongoing financial commitment; leadership; construction expertise

.5. a clear UU identity — personally, congregationally and in the community at large — expressed both verbally and through our actions,

strengthen our identities as UU's so we can all give an elevator pitch
have meetings to discuss our identity and ideas
hear short service speeches from UUs
take field trips to other churches and faiths
strengthen our identity in the community
discover what public perception is of us
take out hot-topic ads
co-sponsor functions
T-shirts
strengthen UU connection with our children and youth
Report from RE teacher at end of service
Adults visit youth groups to talk about UU identity
Continue with youth-led services

Resources needed: new publicity committee; leadership; increased Advertising budget

.6. shared leadership.

Hire paid staff to provide expertise & leadership and prevent burn-out of members
Year 1: decide what kind of staff: Minister, administrator, RE leader? Make financial plan. Need surveys, town hall meetings, etc.
Year 2: Hiring process
Year 3: evaluate

Have Board focus on 2-4 major goals per year.

Mentor potential volunteer leaders
Each current leader include 2-3 potential leaders in activities

Resources needed: ongoing financial commitment. Congregational agreement, especially for hiring a minister. Appropriate applicant pool for hiring staff.

Dan Mattern's "Vision" of UUCO in 2013

From the post-Retreat UUCO Service, November 14, 2010

I drive down Jackson Ave from the Square early one Sunday morning, and glance at the UUCO billboard by the old railroad bridge, put up by the UUCO Publicity Committee. This month it says:

"Your Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford
Where we stand tall for our principles, including the dignity of every person.
So we stand tall against torture."

I drive up Old Sardis Road, along the new bike paths that run right up against our "UU This Way" signs, past the new Park Commission indoor soccer stadium, turn right on CR 198, to UU Hall.

The parking lot is still gravel, but there are two new flower beds on either side of the new vestibule that juts out of the front of UU Hall, with a big green-and-blue stained-glass chalice over the door. I don't go in the front door, but I walk around the right side, carrying a big box, glancing at the Eunice Benton Mid-South District Trailer Memorial Volleyball Court that the Fun Committee just finished building on the site of the old trailer, which was sold for target practice to a local hunting club in 2011. Alongside the volleyball court is a grove of young native trees and plants that the Landscaping Committee just planted on the slope there, with a meditation bench surrounded by trumpet vines and nestled against Billy Smith's property line.

Now the new Building comes into view, which everyone calls the "NUU Building," pronounced "Nuuuuuu!" It sits behind our original building, but from the eastern road you can see the brick façade we just laid in, in brick-red brick with a chalice design built in with white bricks. A short breezeway connects the NUU Building to UU Hall, and I use the UUCO President Emeritus key to let myself in. It's lovely inside. The Building Committee has done a great job on the interior. I walk past the High-School-Hangout-and-UUCO-File-Cabinet-Storage Room and the Middle-School-Hangout-and-UUCO-Photocopier Room. In the Lower Elementary Classroom I see several crates of canned goods that our youth collected in their food drive this month. They are going to take the cans to the Pantry when they volunteer there all next week. Meanwhile, the Community and Justice Committee's puppets that they are using for the Oxford Exchange Club's Stop Child Abuse and Neglect puppet shows are in the Upper Elementary Classroom. That was inspired by our 2011 Social Justice Audit. I'm taking in a box of UUCO T-shirts that I am going to leave for our volunteers to wear. On the back they say "Oxford's Unitarian Universalists – Living Our Principles." On the front they say: "UUCO – Pondering Life's Big Questions."

I go out of the NUU Hall, through the breezeway, and into the back door of UU Hall. On the left is the expanded kitchen, big enough for a table to put our coffee

maker and trays of post-service refreshments. But on the right, where the old RE room was, is the office of our minister, Mrs. Spotsworthy. She has just entered to get ready for Sunday services, and we chat for a minute. She is warm and vivacious, and she shows me new photos on her iPad-6 of her grandchildren. She tells me once again how delighted she is that she found a place to retire that would let her continue her ministry part-time. I tell *her* once again how delighted we are that she's already on Medicare, so we don't have to pay health care benefits. Because otherwise we could not have afforded even a half-time minister. As it was, it took us two and a half years of looking to find a half-time minister willing to live in Oxford.

But Rev. Mrs. Spotsworthy has worked out great. She has put our committees into order so that Sunday services are running smoothly on their own, with set-up crew, greeters, coffee maker and clean-up crew all scheduled a month in advance. She coordinates child care and facilitates R.E., but R.E. – both the 3 kids' classes and the 5 various adult groups – are run by member volunteers. She gives the Sunday service program about once a month, which gives us the opportunity to have lots of variety in our other services. She's the service leader most other weeks, which helps unify our congregation, but she's sensitive to having services conducted in lots of different ways. She encourages members to be service leaders and well as speakers, so she mentors us in leading services, and a member does it about once a month.

I leave Mrs. Spotsworthy to her preparations, and go out into the sanctuary, which is about 25% bigger with the expansion into the two front rooms. It's a good size for our congregation, which has grown to about 50 at a typical service. It's not a huge increase in membership, which means our budget is tight, and we have had to beg pretty hard in our last pledge drive to get larger pledges. But it feels like a good size.

The set-up crew has just arrived to get ready for today's service. You don't know them. It's Bob and Sam, and they're new in town. They found us through our Facebook page. In fact, you won't recognize about half the congregation. Along with our modest growth, there's just a lot of turnover in a college town. Maybe *you've* even moved to another town, and are going to UU there instead of here.

Well, I'll browse the Book Exchange Bookshelf in the vestibule, and then settle in for today's service. It's part of our "This I Believe Crossfire" series, with a Druid and a Muslim. They are married, and sharing a visiting lectureship in the Ole Miss religion department. After the service and a break for refreshments, there will be a second 45 minutes of discussion for those who want to keep talking. We call it one of our "DUUble Decker Sundays."

I'm looking forward to it.