

the **unitarian** and  
**free christian**  
churches



From Vision to Action

The  
next  
steps



*These are the 'Next Steps' we plan to take in  
realising the Vision of our Future.*

*We want you to join with us in making this a reality.*

*Eighteen months ago, we embarked upon a journey that invited Unitarians and Free Christians to imagine a vision for our future. We are still on that journey, exploring new possibilities that can keep us relevant to the world, increase our reach and ensure that Unitarians and Free Christians will continue to make a difference.*

*In our vision, we seek a personal faith through rational thought, respecting individual conscience. We are inspired to serve humanity, working with others for social justice. We want to encourage spiritual inspiration and engage with all people seeking answers to life's questions; welcoming new forms of religious expression and collaborating and sharing in a spirit of mutual support. Our organisation and membership will need to be supported by our volunteers and a willingness to give.*

*As the decline of organised religion continues in this country and in many other parts of the Western world, a new 'disorganised' religion is evolving and we should be ready to embrace the demand that this creates. We are uniquely positioned, freed from the constraints of traditional dogma and creed to offer something very different, something that will be relevant to modern living and that will find new inspiration in the wisdom of all sacred texts.*

*Our challenge is to energise and inspire those who are prepared to give of themselves in the service of humanity. This document outlines how we can shape our organisation to meet our goals.*

ROBERT INCE

CONVENOR: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### Acknowledgements

The Executive Committee wishes to thank all those who have joined in the vision process by attending meetings and making constructive comment in many different ways. We would also hope that this dialogue will continue to flow with new ideas and thoughts as we progress with this plan.

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# The Next Steps

## Reaching outwards

- Develop a comprehensive response to explain our identity
- Support a web based spiritual learning resource  
with Unitarian College Manchester
- Engage with the wider community on today's issues
- Increase collaboration with other like minded organisations
  - Promote more Unitarian thought and writing
  - Formulate a plan to undertake Campus Ministry
  - Support new congregational development

## Improving ourselves

- Grow our volunteer pool
- Find more flexible ways of training for Ministry
- Develop and integrate different forms of ministerial training  
(including recognised lay ministry training)
- Work with the Districts to create a new forum for national involvement
- Understand and reduce threats to building and financial sustainability
  - Review the effectiveness of our organisation
  - Update 'Help is at Hand' as an on-line resource
  - Reduce our carbon footprint





# Reaching outwards

## 'AS THE WORLD CHANGES, SO MUST WE'

### **Being Relevant**

Unitarians try to face the world as it is, not how it used to be, interpreting ancient wisdom in today's terms. Consider the vision that we want the world to feel our presence. If we are to be truly sustainable, we need to see ourselves going to where we are needed. We need to become relevant to people where we find them. As the world changes, so must we.

### **Explaining who we are**

Everybody agrees that more must be done to create a clear message about who we are and what we believe in.

### **Next Step**

*As a matter of priority, we must provide a comprehensive response to this question suitable for different occasions.*

### **Social Justice and Social Action**

Social Justice and Social Action are part of who we are, not something we do simply to get noticed. We always want to do more!

### **Next Step**

*We will seek to collaborate with more organisations, religious and secular, who share our objectives in particular areas and encourage congregations and districts to do likewise at a local level.*

### **Searching for yourself**

The way people learn has changed over the years, particularly with the advent of the Internet; a simple Google search, often overwhelms us with its wealth of information.

### **Next Step**

*To help those looking for answers to life's questions or wanting to build their own theology, we will join together with Unitarian College Manchester (and hopefully others) to develop a web based spiritual learning resource for the benefit of **all** those searching for spiritual inspiration, not just Unitarians.*

### **Engaging with others**

Self study is only a part of self discovery and spiritual development; there is real value in face to face discussion - sharing each other's thoughts and experiences first hand.

### **Next Step**

*Our challenge now is for all of us to expand and promote our engagement with the wider community on spiritual issues and to find ways of reaching more people who are in search of the answers to life's questions.*

### **Unitarian thought & writing**

The General Assembly has always supported and encouraged Unitarian writings. New technology has now lowered the barriers to information and publication.

### **Next Step**

*We want to look for new ways to help and increase the body of Unitarian thought and inspirational writing.*

# Ministry in all its forms

## ‘THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER IS TO HELP THE CONGREGATION IN ITS MINISTRY TO THE WORLD’

We believe that the role of a minister is to help the congregation in its ministry to the world and whilst the ultimate achievement of those called to ministry is acceptance onto the Rolls, many perform their ministry with no aspiration to progress that far.

We will continue to support our ministers, make every effort to assure a viable stipend and encourage continuing professional development.

**Selection for ministry.** Those who feel called to ministry of whatever form are often constrained by their financial and family commitments.

### **Next Step**

*We will search for more flexible ways to allow study recognising the needs of individual circumstances.*

### **The building blocks of training**

Our aim is to provide the best possible ministry for congregations.

We have now established the competencies required for ministers, but there is no recognised training for lay ministry, though the Worship Studies Course provides an excellent grounding up to advanced level.

### **Next Step**

*We want to see a progression from the Worship Studies Course, through recognised training for lay ministry, to*

*full professional ministry training that ensures consistency in competencies, assessment and the curriculum. We will continue with work to identify module providers and develop the curriculum, recognising that this will take some considerable time to be completed.*

### **Congregational Development**

Do not expect new congregations to be created in the image of the old ones because we will be looking to reach out to those who want to practice religion in all sorts of new ways.

### **Next Step**

*We will continue with the 2020 project, looking to the Districts for local support and knowledge.*

**Campus ministry** is a new initiative that we will pursue. We have yet to fully explore what this might mean in practice, but our initial thinking points to reaching out to colleges and universities - engaging with them in a way and at a level that we have never tried to do before.

### **Next Step**

*We expect we will need to pilot this initiative before deciding exactly what our campus ministry will look like, drawing upon the specific needs of the student population.*



# How we organise ourselves

## ‘GROWING OUR VOLUNTEER POOL IS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF OUR MOVEMENT’

### **Volunteers**

Growing our volunteer pool is critical to the success of growing our movement. Volunteers are very much the key to our future. We should appreciate them far more than we do. It is their energy and enthusiasm that will make the difference.

#### ***Next Step***

*We must all improve the way our volunteers are treated and try to organise their activities around discrete packages of work rather than committee type roles where we can. We want congregations to encourage, support and develop volunteers to serve at District and National level.*

### **District and National level**

We are aware of a feeling of disconnect from national decision making; the continuing shortage of good volunteers has prevented us achieving all that we might have.

#### ***Next Step***

*We want to look for new ways to directly involve the Districts in dialogue about national activities and joint working through new forms of involvement.*

*We will review how the various groups and committees can operate more effectively.*

**‘Help is at Hand’** is now in need of update to ensure all the latest and best advice is made available to congregations.

#### ***Next Step***

*We will develop and maintain an on-line version of ‘Help is at Hand’.*

### **Sustainability**

Our aim is for the General Assembly, its congregations and fellowships to be sustainable in the long term, but we don’t really understand the overall financial and building sustainability of our member congregations.

#### ***Next Step***

*We will look for ways to more fully understand where the challenges lie and how we may help. And, since we care for our planet, we should all work towards making our buildings more environmentally sustainable and reducing our carbon footprint.*

### **Supporting each other**

We need to collaborate more and share our problems and successes in the spirit of mutual support.

#### ***Next Step***

*We look to the District Associations and congregations to foster mutual support in both dealing with difficulties and sharing successes.*

# Where will our money go?

‘MONEY IS AN ENABLER FOR WHAT WE WANT TO DO’

**Imagine** what our Movement would look like if money was flowing easily and plentifully, delivering what we wanted to happen! Our Movement would look, feel and sound very different. We would be sustainable. We would stand out as different for positive reasons. We would be worth coming to talk to.

## **Next Step**

*Together, we need to change our thinking. Money is an enabler for what we want to do, not a self imposed constraint on what we can't do.*

## **New Initiatives**

As we expand our horizons, new ideas will require new money if they are to succeed. But, when we talk money first, it's a sure way to stall, delay or prevent a project from going ahead.

## **Next Step**

*Let's turn our thinking around; project first, then money.*

## **Our knowledge base**

Essex Hall and the EC are low cost sources of knowledge entirely dedicated to the Movement. Equally valuable are our other volunteers; they have a great wealth of knowledge, drive and determination.

## **Next Step**

*We will need to find ways to nurture, support and grow our volunteers and any new paid positions which focus on particular projects will have to be financed by new income streams.*

**Giving:** We are reaching out to make our presence felt across the world. It is a huge project! Wouldn't it be great to be able to say, when asked why we gave so much: 'it's my way of contributing to help our Movement to grow till we are more connected across the world'.

## **Next Step**

*It's going to take money, time and compassion - especially money - to make this huge project a success. We must plan for the future as well as short-term giving.*

## **Understanding its effect**

And finally, when we see our money 'go' somewhere, look upon it as going on a mission. Imagine if your money was going on a journey around the world like a person; you'd want photos and updates.

## **Next Step**

*Find out where your money has been, not just where you let it go. Then you will know where the money comes from; a full virtuous circle complete.*

## **Growth**

Traditionally, we have measured our membership through church attendance on a Sunday and the congregational quota but in today's world, Sunday Service is not the 'be all and end all' of spiritual life.

## **Next Step**

*Our challenge is to reach more people, not necessarily to increase numbers in the pews. We need new ways of understanding how many people we reach and why?*

.. and what can YOU do?

BE PART OF THE VISION

UNDERSTAND YOUR POTENTIAL

BE A SERVICE TO YOUR COMMUNITY

KEEP UP TO DATE WITH TECHNOLOGY

BECOME MORE VISIBLE



Take the next steps!



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