

# **Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua Board of Trustees Governance Policies**

**Draft: May 8, 2005**

## **I. Church Purpose and Goals**

### **Vision**

The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua, New Hampshire will be a beacon of liberal religious thought and action whose members are committed to the search for truth and meaning, the acceptance of diversity, and the promotion of social justice within a supportive and caring community.

### **Mission and Covenant**

Embracing the Purposes and Principles of Unitarian Universalism and the Vision we have chosen, as members of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua, New Hampshire, we will:

Support and respect one another in our searches for meaning, value, and personal/spiritual growth;

Join with one another in providing, nurturing, and celebrating a free religious community through common worship, shared activities, and programs for all ages;

Promote a sense of family within the congregation through mutual support and friendship, and by attending to each other's needs;

Be a positive presence for, and work to create, a more just, humane and caring society through outreach to our local community and to the wider human family.

### **Goals**

#### ***Worship & Spiritual Development***

We enable spiritual growth, for each of us and as a church community. We provide a place where new and long-time members from various religious backgrounds feel free to question their beliefs and find support in seeking their own personal insights into life's meaning and value. We encourage each member to decide what is truly important in his or her life and to make life changes accordingly.

We join with one another in providing, nurturing, and celebrating a free religious community through common worship offering both spiritual and intellectual depth, as well as through other forms and settings.

- We provide a worship setting and experience consistent with Unitarian Universalist principles and values and including traditional elements such as music, readings, sharing from individual participants and a sermon. We include varieties and variations on these elements regularly, e.g. different forms and types of music and different service structures.

We encourage and support smaller groups of members and friends joining together to explore areas of particular interest for spiritual and personal growth.

We promote a sense of family through mutual support, friendship, and by attending to each other's needs.

We offer opportunities for members to act on their personal spirituality to make a difference in our church community, neighborhood, and the world.

- This includes such activities as outreach programs, with meaningful opportunities (financial and otherwise) to contribute to them.

### ***Religious Education***

Our religious education program uses the sources, traditions and principles of Unitarian Universalism and the world's religions to help our youth and adults develop a religious and spiritual basis for living life, with all of its joys and difficulties. We don't provide answers but help them to think for themselves in developing their own beliefs.

- We provide adults with opportunities, both as individuals and in groups, to actively engage, dialog, and develop their individual religious perspectives.

Our students are given opportunities to develop and be appreciated for their individual interests and strengths. Diversity is valued and celebrated.

- Our curricula offer a variety of approaches to achieve our objectives, such as art, drama, and discussion.

Our religious education program provides "hands on" opportunities for our children to contribute to and work on community service projects. In doing so, they experience and develop values of compassion, generosity and justice.

### ***Church Community and Fellowship***

As a caring community, we ensure that existing and new members have the support of people who connect them to the church, to be there in good times as well as during life's challenges.

We consciously identify and contact members and friends who may be drifting away or who leave the church.

We consciously welcome and embrace visitors and new members. All church members proactively help new members feel welcome and become aware of and involved in the life of the church.

- This includes such opportunities as the UU 101 class, a mentoring program, committee volunteering, and covenant groups to foster learning and comfort with our church.

We provide opportunities for fellowship.

- These include such activities as yearly group trips to Ferry Beach in the spring and Cardigan Mountain in the winter, circle dinners, the service auction, and group efforts that support causes outside of our church.

### ***Community Presence and Outreach***

Our church maintains a strong and generous presence in our community. We define community in a large sense: as a group with whom we share common interests, whether local, state, national or international.

We build relations within our community to extend our outreach, promote our values, and live out our mission. Our church continually extends our presence into different areas of the community.

We are flexible to respond to crisis or urgency, and we assert our "voice" when our principles are being violated or when we can promote our values by speaking out "in favor." We take a stand when government policies, industry practices, or individual actions threaten the health, safety, or natural resources of the communities in which we live. And we express our agreement when a new policy, practice, or action is in line with our values.

Our church makes a difference in the greater Nashua area through our beautiful and welcoming physical facilities. They host our Sunday services, provide space for numerous public and private events, and offer a meeting place to many groups in our community, especially groups who might not otherwise have a place to meet.

We support the White Wing School program to offer high quality preschool and kindergarten and the school's efforts to serve a diverse population of children from the neighborhood and greater Nashua area.

Our church contributes significant funding and church member involvement to outreach programs that address social, economic, and educational needs in our community. In this, we share our wealth and talent with groups in need of our help and establish our community presence by our participation.

- As an example of our outreach, we support the Granite State Organizing Project (GSOP), which is working to build a stronger voice in the community and improve the lives of people in New Hampshire.

### ***Denominational Presence & Outreach***

We choose to be a Unitarian Universalist congregation that participates fully in both the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and in the New Hampshire-Vermont District of the UUA. We do to join with and mutually support other churches sharing similar and compatible principles.

We keep our congregation informed about denominational issues and activities.

Our church provides its fair share of financial support to both the UUA and the District. We send delegates and workshop leaders to activities and conferences whenever feasible.

We provide professional expenses for our staff to assist and encourage them to actively and fully participate in their respective professional groups. We encourage the leaders in our congregation to participate in the activities of the UUA and the District. In so doing, they help us to learn from the experiences of other churches and to share what we have learned.

We also seek to make and maintain connections with other Unitarian Universalist churches internationally.

Our church provides financial support for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's activities to advance social justice throughout the world and to put into practice our Unitarian Universalist principles that affirm the worth, dignity and human rights of every person, and the interdependence of all life.

We provide a teaching congregation to support the development of student ministers. Our church life is enriched by what they bring to our ministry.

We offer year-round services to provide spiritual support for our members throughout the year and to make ourselves available to visitors who may be looking for a church, no matter what time of year they choose to visit.

## II. Executive Team Limitations

The Executive Team is responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the Church to achieve the *Church Purpose and Goals*. In so doing, the Executive Team is empowered to take whatever action it deems prudent, except for those actions specifically prohibited here.

The Executive Team shall not cause or allow any practice, activity, decision, or organizational circumstance that is either unlawful, imprudent, in violation of commonly accepted business and professional ethics, or in violation of the Unitarian Universalist *Principles and Purposes*.

**Treatment of Church Members and Visitors.** With respect to interactions with Church members and visitors, including children, the Executive Team shall not cause or allow conditions, procedures, or decisions that are unsafe, undignified, unnecessarily intrusive, or that fail to provide appropriate confidentiality or privacy.

**Treatment of Church Staff.** With respect to the treatment of paid and volunteer Church staff, the Executive Team may not cause or allow conditions that are unfair or undignified.

**Compensation and Benefits to Church Staff.** With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits to Church staff, the Executive Team shall not cause or allow jeopardy to fiscal integrity or public image.

**Financial Planning and Budgeting.** Financial planning for any fiscal year or the remaining part of any fiscal year shall not deviate materially from the *Church Purpose and Goals*, risk fiscal jeopardy, or fail to be derived from a multiyear plan.

**Financial Condition and Activities.** With respect to the actual, ongoing financial condition and activities, the Executive Team shall not cause or allow the development of fiscal jeopardy or a material deviation of actual expenditures and income from the annual budget approved by the congregation or Board priorities established in the *Church Purpose and Goals*.

**Asset Protection.** The Executive Team shall not allow the assets of the Church to be unprotected, inadequately maintained, or unnecessarily risked.

**Communication and Support to the Board.** The Executive Team shall not permit the Board to be uninformed or unsupported in its work. Accordingly, the Executive Team shall not:

- Neglect to submit monitoring data required by the Board in a timely, accurate, and understandable fashion.
- Fail to report in a timely manner an actual or anticipated non-compliance with any policy of the Board.

### III. Board Process

The purpose of the Board of Trustees, on behalf of the membership of the Church, is to see to it that the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua achieves its *Church Purpose and Goals*, while avoiding unacceptable actions and situations.

**Governing Style.** The Board will govern with an emphasis on (1) outward vision rather than internal preoccupation, (2) encouragement of diversity in viewpoints, (3) strategic leadership more than administrative detail, (4) clear distinction of Board of Trustees and Executive Team roles, (5) collective rather than individual decisions, (6) future rather than past or present, and (7) proactivity rather than reactivity.

**Board Job Description.** The job of the Board is to represent the Church membership in determining and ensuring appropriate organizational performance in alignment with the *Church Purpose and Goals* and in adherence to the *Executive Team Limitations* policies.

**Agenda Planning.** The Board will follow an annual agenda that (1) completes re-exploration of the *Church Purpose and Goals* annually and (2) continually improves Board performance through Board education and enriched input and deliberation.

**Chairperson's Role.** The chairperson assures the integrity of the Board's process and, secondarily, occasionally represents the Board to outside parties.

**Board Committee Principles.** Board committees, when used, will be assigned so as to reinforce the wholeness of the Board's job and so as never to interfere with delegation from Board to Executive Team.

**Cost of Governance.** Because poor governance costs more than learning to govern well, the Board will invest in its governance capacity.

**Board Members' Code of Conduct.** The Board commits itself and its members to ethical, businesslike, and lawful conduct, including proper use of authority and appropriate decorum when acting as Board members. Accordingly, Board members subscribe to the following *Board Covenant*.

## Board Covenant

The members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, New Hampshire, acting in the tradition of the Free Church, have entrusted us with the responsible governance of our congregation. To help us honor that trust we promise the following to one another. As fellow members of the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, we will:

**Maintain a sense of the sacred.** Even as we attend to matters of business, we will remember that our purpose is to advance the mission and covenant of the Church.

**Make efficient use of our time.** We will focus on the issue on the table with minimum distractions and complete our work in a timely manner. To this end we will each make a single point just once while allowing key issues to be fully discussed.

**Show respect for one another.** We will honor the dignity of our fellow Board members and respect their opinions. We will seek to avoid interruptions during a discussion of an issue, and will respect each other's time.

**Take responsibility to express our opinions on issues before us.** We recognize that we each have an obligation to express our views on important matters that come to the Board.

**Make written documents available in advance of meetings.** We will make available in advance to our fellow Board members any written report we wish to bring before the Board, as a Committee Liaison or in any other capacity.

**Devote attention to such documents in advance of meetings.** We will show respect for our fellow Board members by giving serious attention to any material they offer prior to Board meetings.

**Minimize committee reports.** We will process reports of normal, ongoing committee operations outside of Board meetings, and bring only exceptional items calling for Board action to our Executive Board meetings.

**Use email with care.** We will refrain from the use of email in dealing with especially sensitive issues that come before us, being mindful that email can reach unintended recipients.

**Respect the dignity of Board decisions.** We will stand behind the decisions the Board has made once the decision making process has been fairly completed. We may offer varying opinions in our discussions but will stand behind the decision that is made.

**Trust each other and each other's discretion on sensitive issues.** We will exercise great care with respect to how we discuss Board deliberations outside of Board meetings, and we will trust each other about what is said to whom.

**Extend the principles of our covenant outside the Board.** We commit to extending the principles of this covenant throughout our involvement with the Church community.

**Help each other observe the covenant.** We give each other permission to gently point out a breach of the covenant.

## IV. Board and Executive Team Linkage

The relationship between the Board of Trustees, which sets policy, and the Executive Team, which manages Church operation, is defined here. The Board's sole official connection to the operational organization, its achievements, and conduct is through the Executive Team.

**Unity of Control.** Only decisions of the Board acting as a body are binding on the Executive Team.

**Accountability of the Executive Team.** The Executive Team is the Board's only link to operational achievement and conduct, so all authority and accountability of Church staff, as far as the Board is concerned, is considered the authority and accountability of the Executive Team.

**Delegation to the Executive Team.** The Board will instruct the Executive Team through written policies that prescribe the *Church Purpose and Goals* to be achieved and describe organizational situations and actions to be avoided (*Executive Team Limitations*), allowing the Executive Team to use any reasonable interpretation of these policies.

**Monitoring Executive Team Performance.** Systematic and rigorous monitoring of Executive Team performance will be solely against the only expected Executive Team job outputs: organizational accomplishment of the *Church Purpose and Goals* and organizational operation within the boundaries established in the *Executive Team Limitations*. Accordingly:

- Monitoring is simply to determine the degree to which Board policies are being met.
- The Board of Trustees will acquire monitoring data by one or more of three methods:
  - By internal report, in which the Executive Team discloses compliance information to the Board.
  - By external report, in which an external, disinterested third party selected by the Board assesses compliance with Board policies.
  - By direct Board inspection, in which a designated member or members of the Board assess compliance with the appropriate policy criteria.

Policy	Method of Monitoring	Frequency
Overall Priorities to Achieve the <i>Church Purpose and Goals</i>	Internal Report	Annually
Worship and Spiritual Development (Goals)	Internal Report	Annually
Religious Education (Goals)	Internal Report	Annually
Church Community and Fellowship (Goals)	Internal Report	Annually
Community Presence and Outreach (Goals)	Internal Report	Annually
Denominational Presence and Outreach (Goals)	Internal Report	Annually
Treatment of Church Members and Visitors (Limitations)	Internal Report	Annually
Treatment of Church Staff (Limitations)	Internal Report	Annually
Compensation and Benefits to Church Staff (Limitations)	Internal Report	Annually
Financial Planning and Budgeting (Limitations)	Internal Report	Twice per Year
Financial Condition and Activities (Limitations)	Internal Report External Report	Monthly Annually
Asset Protection (Limitations)	Internal Report External Report	Quarterly Annually
Communication and Support to the Board (Limitations)	Direct Inspection	Annually