

PARTNERING W/CURRENT PROGRAMS/EXPANSION, FOCUS: OUTREACH

First Church has long been known for its active involvement in the community. We strive to be born anew with a strong voice against hate, violence, racism—a voice of love and equality—a voice of peace. In recent years it has become obvious that there is a need to do more than hand out food and clothing, or fund mission-oriented entities. There is a need to make systemic changes that will enable all people to live the American Dream; to have jobs with wages that provide necessities like food, shelter in a safe neighborhood, childcare, education, and time to relax and play. Changes in our corrections and mental health systems are needed to enable people to get the help they need to move from being dependent on handouts, to being able to provide for themselves.

Our proposal addresses this change in approach by offering a way for us to become involved with systemic change while still offering opportunities for meeting immediate needs. We have chosen the Vermont Interfaith Action organization as the vehicle through which the preliminary proposals that lend themselves to systemic change can best be met. The preliminary proposals that offer opportunities for addressing immediate needs have stand-alone plans. As we began to research each preliminary proposal, it became clear that each had its own path to completion. Each path will require active participation, meeting with and listening to those we hope to serve; inspired by Praying with Our Feet, a book many of us read in preparation for the visioning process.

We propose that the following preliminary proposals be adopted with the modifications and recommendations described therein.

Year-round support VIA (membership and active participation in Vermont Interfaith Action)

REFERENCES: viavt.org; Lucy Samara; Bill Neil; Debbie Ingram, Executive Director, VIA

“VIA is a faith-based, grassroots coalition of congregations that transforms ordinary people into empowered and engaged citizens. Our goal is to create the hope, power, knowledge, and political will needed to make compassion and social justice a reality for all Vermonters.” (Debbie Ingram)
Currently VIA has groups that are addressing racial justice/public safety, racial justice/economic opportunities, affordable housing/homelessness, corrections reforms, and immigration. Several preliminary proposals focus on needs that are included in these groups. We are already affiliated with VIA, several of our members are actively participating in some of the groups, and Elissa Johnk is on the Board.

Plan: Offer some introductory sessions with Debbie Ingram and encourage people to join forces with this powerful opportunity to really make a difference by changing unjust systems. These sessions will need to be well advertised and be motivational in nature. We need to move people from just having a vision to being an active participant in it.

Cost \$ 1,000/ annual dues.

SOURCE: Operating budget? Outreach Team budget? Other?

The following preliminary proposals can best be addressed through VIA.

Economic Security for all

REFERENCES: wisevoter.com, VIA Special Report- A vision of a moral economy-Jan. 2023

According to wisevoter.com Vermont's livable wage is \$17.81. With continued pressure on the state legislature, the minimum wage increased this year to \$13.08, more than \$3 short of a livable wage. Not only that, many people do not get 40 hours of work a week. This puts them further away from being able to meet even the most basic needs.

PLAN: Continued efforts toward economic security for all can be addressed through VIA's economic justice organizing group. In this way we, collectively, can exercise our influence in a robust way to make the case for the necessity of a livable wage.

Financial support for tenants to purchase the property they live in

REFERENCES: New York Times article, May 6, 2022, *A landlord 'underestimated' his tenants. Now they could own the building.* by Ronda Kayson

Renters in NYC found some legal and financial help to purchase the building they lived in. Presumably increasing rent or deteriorating building conditions sparked this innovative idea. However, in Burlington, the scarcity of housing is currently the bigger issue.

Plan: The need for more housing can best be addressed through our participation in VIA's housing organizational group where eventually this idea might be implemented.

Social services position(s) on/affiliated with Burlington Police

REFERENCES: Vermont Public, Vermont Edition interview with Chief Jon Murad; *Seven Days* articles on policing in Burlington; Bill Neil working with the VIA Racial Justice/Public Safety group; Kara Alnasrawi, Burlington City staff

There has been much dissatisfaction with policing policy and behavior in Vermont, including in the city of Burlington, for many years. This has led to friction among police, city leaders, and citizens. At the same time increases in homelessness, drug misuse, and lack of proper mental health treatment have progressively increased the need for better police protection. The police department is working hard to improve its practices. The department has 60 officers and seeks to hire more but recruits are scarce. There are 12 officers designated as outreach workers. Social workers are available. It appears the department is moving in the right direction.

PLAN: continue to actively support VIA's Racial Justice/Public Safety group

New support for current, creative outreach; addressing mental health issues in the Burlington community.

REFERENCES Kara Alnasrawi, Burlington City staff; Governor Scott's Inaugural address; conversations with several EMT's and psychiatrists; Denise Vignoe, Director of Development and Communications, Howard Mental Health Center; Mental Health America; Vermont Department of Mental Health- FY 23 Budget; Commissioner Emily Hawes

Mental health is a State and Federal responsibility. The Federal Government works in partnership with the states to address mental health. Much of the funding comes from the Federal level along with regulations and restrictions. This often leaves many areas of mental health needs with inadequate funding. The lack of proper and prompt mental health care has led to increasing violence and homelessness. The barriers to mental health care are caused by the scarcity of funding, beds, physicians, nurses and EMT's on the local level.

PLAN: This is a long-term issue which will take years to solve. For now, working with the Legislature to pass bills that will provide more funds to support mental health efforts would be a starting point. Addressing this issue through VIA by initiating a new community organizing group would be advisable.

Human Resources for The Above Proposals

Hub Coordinator
Outreach Team

The following preliminary proposals are stand-alone initiatives.

Expansion of Jump (Joint Urban Ministry Project) offerings

REFERENCES: Board Chair, Anne Tewksbury-Frye

JUMP is in the process of reorganizing. Their greatest need is financial to help pay for new personnel and training. Once their leadership has stabilized and they have clear plans for serving the needs of their clients they expect to need physical space in our church. The space under the pulpit is particularly attractive to them.

PLAN: Support JUMP in its efforts to hire new staff

Cost: up to \$20,000 as a one-time donation

Sources: RMH funds, leveraging 2:1 matching

Special offering at a service focused on JUMP and its mission.

Encourage all entities included in this ministry to share the cost.

Support immigrant and refugee families

REFERENCES: vrrp@uscrvt.org, Bruce Hewitt

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program is a local organization which provides numerous opportunities for people to be involved with refugees and immigrants. They range from sponsorship to providing for support in language development, culture education and assimilation, or providing for physical needs and job-hunting assistance.

PLAN: Invite VRRP to hold a community informational meeting about its mission. Follow up meetings could feature the personal stories of a variety of ethnic individuals living in the greater Burlington area. These meetings would ideally be held in our new HUB. Following these meetings individuals or groups will interface directly with VRRP to volunteer their time and talent.

REPARATIONS: Abenaki COMMUNITY

REFERENCES: Chief Don Stevens, Nulhagen band of the Coosuk-Abenaki Nation in conversation with Tony Hall

Chief Stevens welcomes the opportunity to develop an ongoing relationship with us. He spoke of the need for understanding and promoting common interests and values. He thinks listening to each other, community, and collaboration are critical. He mentioned the tribe's interest in sustainability; having land on which they could grow crops to feed themselves. They are currently working with Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Nordic Farms and North American Organic Association to meet this need but are seeking more land suitable for growing food crops. He welcomed any recognition of his people.

PLAN: Invite Chief Stevens to speak to our congregation. Perhaps he could be part of a Sunday service and informally share during fellowship hour; or give a more formal talk after worship or scheduled sometime during the week. We could then invite him to speak about Abenaki customs, culture, and influence in the Northeast to the community at large. Through these meetings we will be able to discern what kind of reparation might be meaningful to the Abenaki.

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THE ABOVE

The Ed Hub Coordinator
The Outreach Team
Many volunteers

Vermont Conference UCC Hope Fund

REFERENCES: Vt UCC website, Elissa Johnk

The health, stability, and future of not only the First Congregational Church of Burlington but all UCC churches in Vermont are vital to building and sustaining vibrant and spiritual communities throughout the state..... As stated by the Vermont Conference: "The HOPE Fund will encourage innovation, societal impact and new ministry in our midst. ..." By sharing and investing First Church funds in the HOPE Fund, we are investing in innovation and in our worship and service partners throughout the state. (Excerpts from preliminary proposal). Clearly financially supporting the Hope Fund allows us to include the wider UCC family in our vision. It helps us to remember to look outward, not inward.

Cost: \$25,000 over 3 years (10,10, and 5,000)

Sources: continued focus on Hope Fund as part of Easter and Christmas offerings
Use RMH funds.
individual donations

Establish a street ministry.

REFERENCES: Rev. Nancy Wood, MDiv, ACPE Certified Educator, Manager of Spiritual Care UVM Medical Ctr., Rev. Jenny Gregg, Cathedral of the Beloved, Pittsfield, Ma, Rev. Mary Martha Thiel, Director of Clinical Pastoral Education, Hebrew Senior Life, Howard Mental Health Center

While there is much concern for helping folks meet their physical and emotional needs, we often forget that meeting their spiritual needs is equally important. There are many people in Burlington who are unchurched but are looking for ways to express their spirituality and find community. They may be new to the area, homeless, facing a recent medical diagnosis, experiencing the birth of a child, dealing with the death of a loved one, or experiencing some other joy or crisis. For these people the park bench, café, sidewalk, bar, or a shady lawn may become a sanctuary where a trained street minister can listen, provide comfort and inspiration, celebrate joy and pray.

PLAN: Develop a job description and search for a trained street minister as soon as possible.

Encourage other downtown faith expressions to join us in this endeavor.

There is a possibility that a program being developed by Rev. Nancy Wood at the UVM Medical Center might provide trained street ministers within 5 years which may lower the cost.

COST: The cost could range between \$45,000 and \$110,000 annually.

Sources: Share the cost among downtown faith institutions

RMH funds

Use our new HUB to inform the community at large about this initiative, including the need for financial support

Human resource:

Street minister

Staff supervision, an hour twice a month??

Preliminary Proposals that will not be pursued at this time.

Sunday of Mourning-TBD - led by Elissa Johnk

A tithe for outreach, such as VT Racial Justice Alliance, OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission)

REFERENCES: Outreach Team annual report, Outreach Team member Reid Willis

For many years we split our pledge between the operating budget and mission work, with 10% traditionally going to mission. During Bob Lee's tenure it was recognized that everything the church is and does is mission work. We now usually speak of outreach instead of mission and emphasize the need to become personally involved with those in need, offering our minds and bodies as well as financial support.

Returning to the practice of dividing pledges into 10% for mission and 90% for operating budget is an issue which needs to be discussed by the congregation and Trustees.

Establish/fund a non-profit incubator, providing space, materials, networking; start by funding a position with a social worker with Howard Mental Health and one with the police.

References: Burlington City Community Meeting recording 4/20/22, Kara Alnaswari

Establishing a non-profit incubator, while a worthy initiative, is beyond the scope and capabilities of the church at this time. The reference to a Howard Mental Health and police social worker positions has been addressed in other preliminary proposals.

Establish a volunteer team that could provide minor home repairs for low income and elderly people.

There is a possibility we could partner with Age Well in the future when they reestablish their program for minor repairs.

Financial Reparations for Black people

Resources: Vermont Racial Justice Alliance, Mark Hughes, Roy Hill

VRJA did not respond to our request for information. Racial justice is a driving force behind much of VIA's work. Working through Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) we can amplify our voice to make positive, systemic changes in racial, social, and economic systems for all black people. In our view, a one-time financial sum as reparation is helpful short term, but systemic change will lead to sustainable long-term benefits.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS 3&4

In the original listening sessions everyone was asked, “What is your vision of the church in 3-5 years?”

Reaching out was the most frequently mentioned topic in the information listening gatherings. Some of the specific aspirations were social/racial justice, service, engaging community, being God’s hands in the world, diversity, and being relevant, bold, and visionary. All these aspirations are embraced in this proposal.

Measure of Success:

Reaching out

Presence in the community.

Continued outreach and engagement with the community.

Building use for service.

Addressing the needs of people, especially the disadvantaged

Creating better communication and dialogue

Meeting spiritual needs

Integration of refugees/immigrants into society

More inclusivity

Develop meaningful relationships with the Abenaki and Black people.

Sustainable mission, outreach, and education

More volunteers for community service work and mission work.

Increased participation in congregational and community programming.

Systemic changes in social, racial, and economic justice.

This work will take faith, motivation, and political will.

Digitally signed.

Ann Cerrato

Cyndy McGeoch

Liz Corker

Cyndy Hall

Tony Hall