

RISING UP TO CELEBRATE AND SERVE

A Five-Year Strategic Plan for the First Unitarian Church of Providence

Introduction

This plan charts a five-year path that commences with the 2023-2024 church year. It groups action items under four core aspirations: *Rising Up to Nurture Spirit and Joy*, *Rising Up to Extend Radical Welcome*, *Rising Up to Bend Toward Justice*, and *Rising Up to Ensure Our Future*.

We highlight three to five primary initiatives under each core aspiration. Within each initiative, the plan presents detailed steps presented in a grid format indicating, for each step, *who* will take action, *when* the action will commence, *what* resources may be required, *whether* the step reinforces other core aspirations, and *how* we may determine that progress is being made.

Central themes closely match those voiced during the congregation's Big Day (April 29, 2023): forming stronger connections to one another, making more space and time for fun and fellowship, ensuring that our worship and spiritual life is as vibrant as possible, attending with care to the need for greater diversity and accessibility, taking specific steps toward becoming an anti-racist church, turning outward to pursue public justice in a more focused way, and making sure we have the resources needed to support this bolder profile.

This ambitious plan calls for activity on many fronts to begin simultaneously during the forthcoming church year. As much of the initial activity amounts to creating task forces and study groups, we believe that this frontloading is realistic and achievable. Several initiatives referenced in the plan are in fact already underway.

We emphasize that the strategic plan is a *living document*. Acting for the congregation, the Prudential Committee now bears responsibility not only for implementing the action steps but also for modifying and molding the plan as needed to reflect changing circumstances.

Our richest resource by far is our people: the depth of experience and skill of First U's congregants, working in tandem with a skilled and dedicated cohort of clergy and other staff. We are confident that congregants will rise up to take the new volunteer leadership spots projected in this plan.

The plan recognizes that resource limitations will constrain staff expansion. It calls for the possible creation of just one new staff position: a Coordinator of Community Life who would operate across three of the four core aspirations. This new position could be created by expanding the Membership Coordinator position into a full-time one. The plan assumes that the current part-time music director position will become a full-time position, with the person hired doing considerably more than preparing Sunday service music. Other potential implementation-related costs relate to the use of paid consultants to assist in executing a successful capital campaign and in achieving state-of-the-art church communications. The use of outside consultants may or may not be necessary; that determination lies within the Prudential Committee's discretion.

Most importantly, the plan builds on a sound theory of change. It rests on the belief that making positive change in one area—e.g., making our spaces more functional and more hospitable—will reinforce positive change in other areas—e.g., having more fun together, becoming a church for the city, and even tapping new sources of revenue. A truly robust and comprehensive plan – one that maintains relevance and momentum over its allotted life – seeks to achieve this kind of virtuous circle effect. We hope and expect to see the effect play out at First U as this plan's initiatives unfold and expand under Prudential Committee guidance.

We invite and encourage everyone who cares about First U's future to study the plan carefully, direct questions to members of the Implementation Team or the Prudential Committee, and continue to be part of the big change that our Big Day envisioned.

About the Work of the Strategic Plan Implementation Team

The Prudential Committee constituted and empowered the seven-member team in consultation with the senior minister and other staff. Beginning on May 25, the team met twelve times via Zoom on successive Thursday evenings. In between meetings, team members worked on shaping different parts of the plan. Early on, the team engaged in a SWOT exercise (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) so as to ground its work in a realistic appraisal of our congregational profile. The team's SWOT outcome forms an appendix to the plan. The team reviewed several possible templates for creating strategic plans specific to congregations. In the end, the team opted for a simple and comprehensible format and chose a presentation style that avoids technical jargon to the extent possible. We used a language accessibility app called Hemingway to ensure that our plan can be read by anyone with a basic understanding of English. We will also create an audio file to make it possible for vision-impaired persons to hear and understand the report.

From the start, the image of a mighty tree, rising up from a strong and well-watered root system to sprout green shoots and bear rich fruit among its intertwining branches, inspired our team's work. We reflected on what science now tells us about how trees share intelligence and resources with one another through their root systems. We hope to become that kind of tree: strong in its own right and also connected to other flourishing congregations and valuable secular change agents. We invite First U members and friends to rejoice with us that we may all contribute to a season of growth and renewal, as our church reaches upward to achieve its full potential in a fourth century of witness and service here in Providence.



Peter Laarman and Martha Rice Sanders, co-chairs

Cheryl Bartholomew

Nancy Dooley

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THE FOUR CORE ASPIRATIONS AT A GLANCE

Aspiration One: Rising Up to Nurture Spirit and Joy

Because Sunday mornings are so central in the life of First U, we will reinforce efforts our ministers are already making to achieve soul-stirring excellence in all of our services, drawing from diverse sources of inspiration and challenge. We will introduce new ways of connecting and belonging as members of a more vibrant congregation, in part through the work of a new community life coordinator. Our music and arts programming will blossom under the guidance of a full-time music and arts director and with greater exposure to the art being created within the wider Providence community. With simple fun and fellowship as the goal, we will launch new initiatives to encourage storytelling, multigenerational gathering, and the sharing of oral histories.

Aspiration Two: Rising Up to Extend Radical Welcome

We will plan and carry out concentrated and well-focused activities related to becoming a fully anti-racist church. Our own church's historical involvement with slavery will help to ground this work. We will inform and sensitize ourselves around meeting the challenge of full accessibility in every dimension of our life: programming, physical space, and the language and concepts we use. We will think through the accessibility implications of our wish to become a church for the city. Needed accessibility changes to our physical spaces will in turn help to guide our capital campaign efforts. We will take concrete steps toward ending isolation of children and youth at our church.

Aspiration Three: Rising Up to Bend Toward Justice

A new Justice Education Committee will help facilitate a range of learning experiences around the difference between justice and charity. We will review the church's existing public justice efforts and engage in discernment toward putting more concentrated effort into just two or three areas, forming small justice working groups for coordination in each area. Our work within each area will be linked to the efforts of already-engaged outside community partners. Our anti-racism emphasis and our determination to become a church for the city will undergird and reinforce all of our public justice work. Our justice engagements will find their way into our wider community life and our Sunday worship life without in any way diminishing the spiritual resonance of our Sunday morning experience.

Aspiration Four: Rising Up to Ensure Our Future

To create a culture of greater participation and accountability regarding the financial life of the church, we will make sure that our messaging around money is clear and compelling and relates directly to our other Rising Up aspirations. We will find more openings for members of the community to contribute. We will seek closer coordination among all financial development mechanisms: commitment drive, planned giving, capital campaign, and the pursuit of outside grants. Any changes made in personnel and staffing patterns will relate directly to achieving the aspirations identified in this plan. Out of respect for our budget constraints, we will seek candidates for new full-time positions who are capable of multi-tasking. In striving to achieve state-of-the-art quality in all of our church communications, we will create and empower a new communications task force headed by our director of operations.

Aspiration 1: Rising Up to Nurture Spirit and Joy

Our Congregation Will Become a More Joyful, Vibrant, and Interconnected Spiritual Community

A craving for more spirit, joy, and connection registered clearly throughout our Big Day gathering. While Sunday mornings will always be the beating heart of the congregation, we see so many additional ways to build up joy, hope, and positive energy in a time when developments in the wider world can easily bring us low.

Primary initiatives falling within this core aspiration:

- We will **support and reinforce the work that our ministers are already doing** to create soul-stirring excellence in all of our services, drawing from diverse sources of inspiration and challenge.
- While honoring the richness of our Judeo-Christian and Unitarian inheritance, our worship leaders will **continue to bring the riches of multiple spiritual traditions into the space**: Indigenous teachings, age-old myths from the ancient world, and the wisdom of the East.
- We will **explore the role of joy and fun in sustaining a robust spiritual life**. Recognizing that fun means very different things to different people, we will find more ways to have simple fun together: suppers, dances, excursions, picnics, sing-along nights, etc.
- Our musical and artistic life will blossom as we **draw closer to the cultural resources of the wider community** and begin to host diverse bringers of light and joy in our spaces.
- We will create specific and frequent opportunities to **share personal stories across generational lines**; we may begin to gather oral histories from some of our elders and share spiritual autobiographies of those in our congregation.

Because Sunday mornings are so central, we will support and reinforce the work that our ministers are already doing to create soul-stirring excellence in all of our services, drawing from diverse sources of inspiration and challenge.

OUTCOMES & ACTION STEPS	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Continue to review our services for aspects that might more powerfully inspire insight and joy	Minister(s) Worship Committee Music Director & Music Committee	2023 fall and going forward	Online Resources Books Music libraries Collaboration with Colleagues	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Congregational response to Sunday services is enthusiastic and appreciative
Expand the breadth of musical offerings in services, both in style and ensembles, building on the already strong program	Music Director & Music Committee	2025 fall and going forward	Music Director position expanded: budget implications	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome	Congregational response to music in Sunday services is enthusiastic and appreciative
Maximize use of the majesty and beauty of the Meeting House to add depth to the worship experience	Music Director and Music Committee Worship Committee Senior Minister	2023 fall and going forward	Technical enhancements (sound and light) Organ replacement: budget implications	Aspiration 4: Ensuring Our Future	Success in the capital campaign & wide acceptance of specific upgrade proposals

While honoring the richness of our Judeo-Christian and Unitarian inheritance, our worship leaders will continue to bring the riches of multiple spiritual traditions into the space: Indigenous teachings, age-old myths from the ancient world, and the wisdom of the East.

OUTCOMES & ACTION STEPS	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Provide support and resources to expand on what our worship leaders already do in relation to nurturing spirit and joy, drawing on multiple sources and faith traditions	Minister(s) Worship Committee Music Director & Music Committee DRE & RE Committee	2023 fall and going forward	Online Resources Books Music Libraries Colleagues from other traditions and cultures	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Evidence of multiple spiritual traditions incorporated into our services and other programming

We will explore the role of joy and fun in sustaining a robust spiritual life. Knowing that fun means different things to different people, we will find more ways to have simple fun together: suppers, dances, excursions, picnics, sing-along nights, etc.

OUTCOMES & ACTION STEPS	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Develop a new staff position to coordinate and facilitate social and educational events for adults and children within the congregation	Prudential Committee Sr. Minister Personnel Committee	2024 spring	Create job description for Community Life Coordinator Search Committee	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	New position created and filled (or existing staff person's job description is expanded)

Fill the Community Life Coordinator position	Prudential Committee Minister Personnel Committee	2024 fall/2025 spring	Search Committee and interview process New or expanded position: budget implications	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Staff person hired (or existing staff member's job description is expanded)
Establish a small group to coordinate the scheduling of opportunities and venues for having fun and learning together. (Note: This new coordinating group is also referenced under Aspiration 3.)	Community Life Ministry Groups/committees within the congregation Community Life Coordinator	2024 spring and going forward	New staff person or expanded Membership Coordinator Community Life Ministry	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	A complete calendar of events showcasing and promoting new opportunities for fun and fellowship
Our musical and artistic life will blossom as we draw closer to the cultural resources of the wider community and begin to host bringers of light and joy into our spaces					
OUTCOMES & ACTION STEPS	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Encourage existing groups that plan musical and artistic events to reach out to similar groups across the city and host, or be	Music Director & Music Committee Art in the Atrium	2024 spring and going forward	A more robust music and arts life: budget implications	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome	Scheduling of events that bring in groups from across the city

part of, shared events and activities.				Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	
Provide support and resources for expanded offerings	Music Director & Music Committee Art in the Atrium	2024 spring and going forward	Connections to arts groups in the across the city	Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Scheduling of events that bring in groups from across the city
We will create specific and frequent opportunities to share personal stories across generational lines; we may begin to gather oral histories from some of our elders and share spiritual autobiographies of those in our congregation.					
OUTCOMES & ACTION STEPS	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Invite members to share their stories, perhaps on short videos to be shared with the rest of the congregation	History Committee DRE and RE Committee Membership Coordinator Community Life Coordinator	2024 spring and going forward	Video recording equipment Archiving of the histories A plan to share with the congregation	Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Videos are available to the community for viewing

<p>Create new opportunities for longtime and new members to get to know each other</p>	<p>Membership Coordinator Community Life Coordinator</p>	<p>2024 spring and going forward</p>	<p>Members of the congregation</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Social gatherings that provide newcomers and longtime members to get to know each other</p>
<p>Identify individuals interested in gathering oral histories and provide them with all needed tools</p>	<p>History Committee DRE and RE Committee Community Life Coordinator</p>	<p>2024 spring and going forward</p>	<p>Members of the congregation</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome</p>	<p>Documentation of individual histories and the collective history of the congregation</p>

Aspiration 2: Rising Up to Extend Radical Welcome

Our Church Will Become a Diverse and Inclusive Community in Every Dimension

Big Day participants expressed strong commitment to making inclusion of others and building of diversity ever more real within our common congregational life. They recognized that we remain an overwhelmingly white, wealthy and mature community - and also that we face multiple accessibility challenges. In this aspiration, we understand “welcoming” to extend across race, class, age, ableism, culture and other dimensions.

Primary initiatives falling within this core aspiration:

- We will **focus more regular attention on racism and its relation to patriarchy and class oppression**. We will move forward in growing awareness of how our church, during its first two centuries, helped to create a racialized caste system in Rhode Island and the nation as a whole. We will learn from other congregations that have successfully become anti-racist churches in meaningful ways and put those learnings into practice in our community.
- We will **deepen our knowledge about what full inclusion and full accessibility actually mean**. We will train ourselves and practice extending more welcoming - even as we shape our Sunday gatherings and special events to become more multiculturally appropriate and inviting.
- We will **learn how to see and welcome others across the age spectrum, particularly from our youth**. Many of our youth function in highly diverse environments as an everyday experience and have rich insights to share

We will focus more regular attention on racism and its relation to patriarchy and class oppression. We will move forward in growing awareness of how our church has helped to create a racialized caste system in Rhode Island and the nation as a whole. We will learn from other congregations that have successfully become anti-racist churches in meaningful ways and put those learnings into practice in our community.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Identify persons who will help lead and participate in coordinating the anti-racism effort; define and constitute an Antiracism Team	Prudential Committee Senior Minister Antiracism Team	2023 fall	Internal discussions in and out of committee	Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	Energy engagement level of team nominees Core team begins to meet
Identify other congregations to learn from and engage with them	Antiracism Team Ministers Congregation	2023 fall	Internal discussions in and out of committee Survey instruments	Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	Community engagement Adoption of best practices
Set up and listen in to focus groups and individual sessions to hear the voices of members of communities and groups who feel marginalized within the First U community in relation to race and class	Antiracism Team RE Staff Ministers	2023 fall/ 2024 spring	Facilitators a coordinator of discussions	Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	Number of listening sessions Useful notations and summaries

<p>Continue the process already initiated by the History Committee and Mosaic Team to acquaint congregants with the role of early church members and the church itself in the business of slavery and in the formation of a caste system in Providence</p> <p>Learning opportunities will include walking tours and short courses along with congregation-wide events that unpack the meanings of racial capitalism and caste stratification and their lingering imprints in Providence life today</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee</p> <p>Antiracism Team</p> <p>History Committee</p> <p>RE Director</p> <p>Senior Minister</p>	<p>2023 - Fall</p> <p>2024 - Spring</p> <p>2024 - Fall</p> <p>2025 - Spring</p>	<p>Publication costs related to printing of report and related printed matter</p> <p>Possible website design fee</p> <p>Ongoing compensation for history research intern</p> <p>Honoraria for outside speakers</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Widespread positive reception within the congregation for a rich learning experience that includes exposure to current expressions of racial capitalism here in Providence and society at large</p> <p>Recognition and appreciation from professional historians and others in R.I. who are concerned with our state's deep historic involvement in the business of slavery</p>
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<p>Create a year-long immersive experience, using every mechanism along with outside speakers and UUA-produced resources, focused on understanding what active anti-racism is and steps toward becoming an anti-racist church.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee Antiracism Team Senior Minister RE Director</p>	<p>2024 - Fall 2025 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Honoraria for outside speakers & resource people: budget implications</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Measure against how other churches achieved success in becoming effective in anti-racism work.</p>
<p>Build on our relationship with the Bethel AME Church in deepening our understanding of the Black experience and renewing our commitment to active anti-racism in Providence</p>	<p>Senior Minister Justice Education Committee Antiracism Team</p>	<p>2023 – fall and forward</p>	<p>none identified</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy</p>	<p>Bethel’s leadership and our own leaders report that the relationship is healthy, balanced, and fruitful for all concerned.</p>

We will deepen our knowledge about what full inclusion and full accessibility actually mean. We will train ourselves and practice extending more welcoming - even as we shape our Sunday gatherings and special events to become more multiculturally appropriate and inviting.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Identify church members who will help lead and participate in the inclusion and accessibility efforts Create an Accessibility Working Group	Prudential Committee Ministers Membership Coordinator	2023 fall	Internal discussions in and out of committees and with ministers	Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	Creation and launch of an Accessibility Working Group
Define what we mean specifically by full inclusion and accessibility – and identify examples of practices that will support greater inclusion/ accessibility	Accessibility Working Group Possible consulting specialist	2023 fall	Group effort, with possible consultant expense	Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice	Clarity of definitions in summary assessment report Meaningful engagement with content

<p>Assess/ inventory and consider all aspects of the physical environment of our campus, including stairs; seating; restroom access; hearing and vision accommodations; signage; and electronic, in-person, and paper-based communications</p>	<p>Accessibility Working Group Possible consulting specialist</p>	<p>2024 spring</p>	<p>Group effort Possible consultant expense: budget implications</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Regular (annual?) update of inventory/ assessment report</p>
<p>Listen to and assess the language we use (and in what contexts) in support of increasing radical welcome, using surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, written materials assessments. These groups will include marginalized constituencies.</p>	<p>Accessibility Working Group</p>	<p>2023 fall/ 2024 spring</p>	<p>Scheduled group sessions, survey setup and management</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Clarity of definitions Marginalized groups will report that they feel more fully welcomed and that their needs are being recognized.</p>
<p>Identify and engage with resources in the local community, online, and in other congregations that can assist us with this work</p>	<p>Accessibility Working Group Possible consulting specialist</p>	<p>2024 spring</p>	<p>Group effort Possible consultant expense</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Robust co-participation of First U community with other partners</p>

<p>Educate the congregation on inclusive practices that allow all to participate including responding to behaviors associated with mental illness, dementia, mobility and sensory impairments, children with attention or learning differences, neurodiversity, etc.</p>	<p>Accessibility Working Group</p> <p>Possible consulting specialist</p>	<p>2024 spring and forward</p>	<p>Community presentation sessions</p> <p>Possible consultant expense</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Extensive community interest and participation</p> <p>Production of a summary report on accessibility issues at First U</p>
<p>Apply learning to the planning and execution of remediation of our physical spaces and cultural practices in order to enhance inclusion and accessibility</p>	<p>Prudential Committee</p> <p>Capital Campaign Team</p>	<p>2024 spring and forward</p>	<p>Proposed modifications will be included in capital expense budget and building plans</p>	<p>Aspiration 3: Bending Toward Justice</p>	<p>Congregation will embrace plans for achieving full accessibility and will accept the need to fund these plans</p>

We will learn how to see and welcome others across the age spectrum, particularly from our youth. Many of our youth function in highly diverse environments as an everyday experience and have rich insights to share.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Listen in focus groups and individual sessions to young people and persons of all age groups to determine needs and perceived slights.	RE Director Membership Coordinator Ministers Congregation	2024 spring	This effort requires central coordination by a staff member or competent volunteer	Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Youth feel heard and respected Congregants gain greater awareness of the gifts and needs of the rising generation
Integrate learnings from youth into broader plans for activities related to radical welcome Bring more youth voices to Sunday services	Membership Coordinator RE Director Ministers	2024 fall	Designated coordinator	Aspiration 2: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future	Recognized higher visibility of youth in overall church life

Aspiration 3: Rising Up and Bending Toward Justice:

Our Church Will Have Greater Public Impact for Social Transformation

There is a genuine desire to see First U become a “Church for the City” in ways that will bring a wider variety of people into our space and make our presence and justice work stronger and more impactful throughout the region. At The Big Day, it was widely agreed that our community service and advocacy work could become more effective if our efforts were less fragmented. Personal reflection, deeper group learning, and acknowledgement of our complex congregational history will ground a process of discernment and winnowing that leads to greater focus and greater impact. We will seek to build strategic partnerships with allied groups in our focus areas so as to multiply our effectiveness in bringing about real structural change: systemic rather than symbolic or interpersonal.

Primary initiatives within this core aspiration:

- We will **emphasize the importance of liberatory learning and critical consciousness in doing effective justice work**, recognizing how oppressive structures are easily concealed and normalized within fundamentally unjust societies.
- We will enter a process of discernment to **evaluate what we are doing now at the city and state levels** to see where there is duplication, and to combine and focus efforts wherever possible.
- We will **seek to build powerful strategic partnerships with allied groups** working in our chosen focus areas to maximize our impact.
- We will **bring core social justice concerns into our community life** and special event programming on a regular basis to keep these critical issues front and center.

We will emphasize the importance of liberatory learning and critical consciousness in doing effective justice work, recognizing how oppressive structures are easily concealed and normalized within fundamentally unjust societies.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
<p>We will assess where learning happens now - particularly adult learning - and how much of it is justice-focused learning. To coordinate this work, we will create and empower a new Justice Education Committee.</p>	<p>Prudential Committee RE Director Senior Minister</p>	<p>2023 - Fall 2024 - Spring</p>	<p>Communication within and outside of existing church committees</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Creation of Justice Education Committee and assessment of current justice focused learning</p>
<p>We will identify general topics and those related to our likely justice areas for which deeper understanding will be crucial to doing effective work, and consider sources of training resources.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee RE Director Sr. Minister Antiracism Team</p>	<p>2024 - Spring</p>	<p>Discussion groups, resource search</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Identify important topics and training resources for each.</p>

<p>We will identify appropriate learning mechanisms (e.g., linking sermon and after-service conversations, potluck discussions- with follow-on in small group discussions, reading groups, individual study, etc.) that can expand and enrich learning around topics related to justice.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee Senior Minister RE Director Community Life Coordinator</p>	<p>2023 - Fall 2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Outlines and all needed resource materials linked to each justice learning opportunity</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Flesh out the details of the identified training topics and write up the results</p>
<p>We will create learning opportunities about justice work that are multi-generational to the greatest extent possible (and here the RE director <i>must</i> be deeply engaged for obvious reasons).</p>	<p>RE Director Justice Education Committee Ministers</p>	<p>2023 - Fall 2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Outlines and all needed resource materials linked to each justice learning opportunity</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Reality check with various age cohorts on whether the learning opportunities actually work for them</p>
<p>Our congregation will understand the distinction between justice work and charity work, placing attention and efforts where they will create transformational change within our society, bending toward justice.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee Senior Minister RE Director</p>	<p>2023 - Fall 2024 - Spring 2024 - Fall 2025 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Online and other resources widely available and accessible for faith communities</p>	<p>Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Those grasping the distinction will signal their understanding in how they begin showing up for justice in the targeted areas (see below)</p>

<p>We will educate ourselves about the role of active nonviolence in the creative pursuit of justice and also the importance of nonviolent practice in our personal and interpersonal lives.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee RE Director Volunteer study leader(s)</p>	<p>2024 - Fall 2025- Spring and forward</p>	<p>Widely available online resources and potential partnership with the RI Nonviolence Institute</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 2: Extending Radical Welcome</p>	<p>Significant numbers of First U people will put nonviolence to work in their justice activities and as an enhancement in their spiritual lives</p>
<p>We will enter a process of discernment to evaluate what we are doing now at the city and state levels to see where there is duplication, and to combine and focus efforts wherever possible.</p>					
<p>ACTION</p>	<p>WHO</p>	<p>WHEN</p>	<p>RESOURCES</p>	<p>CONNECTIONS</p>	<p>PROGRESS INDICATORS</p>
<p>We will use a discovery process to identify all current church-based groups and lines of activity that include intentions for public justice as contrasted to charity work. We will create a new Justice Committee, linked to the Justice Education Committee, that will begin to manage this process.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee Senior Minister Prudential Committee (approval)</p>	<p>2024 - Spring</p>	<p>Reports to the congregation We may need to create assessment tools to evaluate current activities according to a public justice scale</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Documentation of all First U public charity efforts and justice-intended lines of activity and their related participants and constituencies</p>

<p>We will seek advice from knowledgeable sources – including potential community partners - as to which particular arenas for justice work in our city and state where we will have the best impact.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Legislative Ministry Ministers Congregation</p>	<p>2024 - Spring 2024 - Fall</p>	<p>Community partners (Current members know many groups and individuals in Providence who can advise us.)</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Compile and evaluate feedback from knowledgeable sources and potential partners as to the justice concerns that make a good “fit” for us.</p>
<p>We will determine which current justice efforts we would like to focus more attention on, which new areas of focus we might wish to add, and how we might bring more resources to each primary justice arena.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Legislative Ministry Senior Minister Congregation</p>	<p>2024 - Spring 2024 - Fall</p>	<p>Reports to the congregation Notes on conversations with potential community partners</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Key justice concerns are proposed with the rationale for each clearly articulated.</p>
<p>We will identify where existing church-based groups or lines of activity overlap or duplicate efforts and where they may be folded into each other for greater effectiveness.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Legislative Ministry</p>	<p>2024 - Spring</p>	<p>Discussions with existing internal groups under consideration for merging</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Existing leaders are fully involved in this discernment process and indicate their support for greater focus and impact.</p>

<p>We will define and fill leadership roles for each selected area of special focus. We will call these Justice Focus Teams. They will work with staff or lay leadership as appropriate, seek volunteers to assist in each focus area, and shape and execute action plans for each.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Ministers Staff Congregation</p>	<p>2024 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>Advice from existing leadership: committee chairs and others</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Justice Focus Teams are unveiled and celebrated on Sunday and in our communications.</p>
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We will seek to build powerful strategic partnerships with allied groups working in our chosen focus areas to maximize our impact.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
<p>Within each particular area of justice work, we will commit to creating partnerships with equality and transparency. Specifically, First U participants will not intimidate or stifle the work of organizations or movements that may involve persons with less formal education and/or a lower socioeconomic status.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Justice Focus Teams Legislative Ministry Senior Minister Staff</p>	<p>2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>existing committees and congregation</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>We will be able to identify strong and ethically grounded connections with at least one, and possibly several, groups working in the particular area of focus</p>
<p>Working in close consultation with our chosen community partners, we will ascertain where and how our First U participation might add value, whether in a particular case or an entire area of focus.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Justice Focus teams Legislative Ministry Senior Minister</p>	<p>2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>community partners</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Leadership and congregants at large will see a clear roadmap of what we intend to do with our community partners.</p>

<p>We will continuously evaluate and adjust what we do through our strategic justice partnerships, realizing that some partnerships will fail and others will blossom. We will recognize that new circumstances may call for us to add to or subtract from our core justice commitments.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Justice Focus teams Senior Minister Prudential Committee (reporting)</p>	<p>2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>tools for evaluation</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Written evaluations will assist in making needed adjustments in focus and/or related community relationships</p>
<p>Because bending toward justice will not diminish our ongoing involvement in various charity projects, we inform and mobilize our charity partners around pressing justice campaigns, when those campaigns have a direct relation to a charity’s area of work.</p>	<p>Justice Committee Charitable teams Legislative Ministry Ministers Staff</p>	<p>2024 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Newsletter Social media Other communication outlets</p>	<p>Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>First U members who remain involved in church-sponsored charity programs will also show up for the related justice campaigns: writing letters, attending hearings and demonstrations, etc.</p>

We will bring core social justice concerns into our community life and special event programming on a regular basis to keep these critical issues front and center

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
<p>The issues, efforts, and results of our particular arenas for justice work will be woven into worship, RE, and community life, so the larger community may be informed and inspired by them.</p>	<p>Senior Minister Worship Committee DRE and RE Committee Justice Education Committee</p>	<p>2024 - Spring and forward</p>	<p>Worship resources identified by our worship leaders</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>The congregation notes and responds to the ways in which our primary justice commitments are affecting the internal life of the church.</p>
<p>Where appropriate and possible, special events and programs will be presented to inform and inspire the attention and efforts of the First U community and/or the general public regarding our focused justice efforts.</p>	<p>Justice Education Committee Senior Minister RE Director</p>	<p>2024 – Fall and forward</p>	<p>Upgraded auditorium & kitchen would greatly enhance First U’s capacity to host justice-focused community events.</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>The church calendar will reflect the frequency of these special events.</p>

<p>Proposed special events and programs will be reviewed by an Event Committee, created to work with the Community Life Coordinator and the Director of Operations to consider the opportunities, costs, scheduling, and feasibility of all proposed events. (Note: This Event Committee is also referenced in Aspiration 1.)</p>	<p>Community Life Coordinator Director of Operations Event Committee</p>	<p>2025 – Spring and forward</p>	<p>Community Life Coordinator: budget implications</p>	<p>Aspiration 1: Nurturing Spirit and Joy Aspiration 4: Ensuring our Future</p>	<p>Composition and role of the new Event Committee is announced to the congregation.</p>
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Aspiration 4: Rising Up to Ensure Our Future

Our Church Will Achieve Our Common Goals by Investing in Staff and Infrastructure

The Big Day revealed a significant level of shared concern about money, infrastructure, and staffing. How will we pay for the numerous physical upgrades we need to make on our campus? How will we finance the levels of staffing that are desirable for a church of our size? How can we reduce our dependence on endowment income and thus build up our reserve funds for inevitable future challenges?

Primary initiatives related to this core aspiration:

- We will **cultivate a culture of participation & responsibility within the congregation**, thereby expanding everyone's sense of having a vital stake in the congregation's thriving and a corresponding sense of financial responsibility for that thriving.
- We will **achieve better coordination among all dimensions of church finance** and we will make the finance side of church life more visible and better understood by our congregants.
- We will **plan and execute a successful capital campaign** to achieve both near-term and long-term capital upgrades that match and support our primary aspirations in programming and ministry.
- We will **expand and "rightsize" church staff** in close relation to our growth and programming goals.
- We will **achieve "state of the art" communications capacity and social media visibility** for a church of our size and ambition.

We will cultivate a culture of participation & responsibility within the congregation, thereby expanding everyone’s sense of having a vital stake in the congregation’s thriving and a corresponding sense of financial responsibility for that thriving.

ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
<p>In relation to all fundraising efforts of the church - the capital campaign, the annual commitment drive, the planned giving program, the annual auction, etc. – we will pay close attention to using motivational language that stresses the “we” in “we can do this”. We will test all messages before using them. Our aspiration to become a more diverse church and a church for the city and a greener church will also be surfaced in our messaging. We will seek to avoid a piecemeal approach in which potential donors are asked to support just one project, e.g., the organ or the kitchen renovation. But we <i>will</i> point to the major difference that particular upgrades can play in our collective thriving.</p>	<p>Prudential Committee Finance and Development Committee Ministers Director of Operations</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>Possible paid design assistance: budget implications</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>Fundraising goals are met or exceeded</p> <p>Messages are received as planned, and members give generously.</p> <p>Milestones will be known and celebrated as they are met.</p>

<p>Finance-related messaging will be reinforced in Sunday services. Fundraising milestones will be celebrated. We will seek to identify, reach out to and build deeper relationships to persons within our community who are "under-committed," based on their income and wealth.</p>	<p>Finance and Development Committee Ministers Staff</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>Reports from committees etc.</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>Messages are received as planned, and members give generously. Milestones will be known and celebrated as they are met.</p>
<p>To raise the yield of the annual commitment drive, we will hold distributed pledge dinners in addition to the usual potluck held in connection with the drive's launch. I.e., individuals host house parties: these are festive and fun events that conclude with a hard pitch to get behind the commitment drive. If there is an all-church pledge dinner, that too will include a fairly blunt pitch along with the shared food and fun.</p>	<p>Finance and Development Committee Commitment Drive Coordinators Staff</p>	<p>2024 - Spring and forward (possibly start earlier?)</p>	<p>Volunteer hosts Event planners Consistent messaging around the invitations</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>Fundraising dinners are well attended and effective pitches are made.</p>
<p>Planned giving opportunities will receive heightened visibility and interpretation, including visibility on our website. More will be said about charitable remainder annuity trusts - a vehicle that might have considerable appeal among our congregants.</p>	<p>Finance and Development Committee Staff</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>website newsletters brochure workshops</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>Increased numbers of people signaling that the church is included in their estate plans</p>

<p>We will clarify how the work of the church deacons relates to fundraising activities and to the building of a culture of participation and responsibility.</p>	<p>Prudential Committee Ministers Staff Deacons</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>None identified</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>Current deacons understand and carry out their roles. Nominating committee articulates the role of deacons during recruitment.</p>
<p>We will achieve better coordination among all dimensions of church finance and we will make the finance side of church life more visible and better understood by our congregants.</p>					
<p>ACTION</p>	<p>WHO</p>	<p>WHEN</p>	<p>RESOURCES</p>	<p>CONNECTIONS</p>	<p>PROGRESS INDICATORS</p>
<p>We will support the work of the Finance & Development Committee that unites formerly fragmented centers together.</p>	<p>Prudential Committee Finance and Development Committee</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>None identified</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>The F&D Committee meets regularly. All fundraising efforts flow from its work.</p>
<p>We will support the role of the Director of Operations as central in the area of finance and development.</p>	<p>Prudential Committee Director of Operations Finance and Development Committee</p>	<p>2023 - Fall and forward</p>	<p>None identified</p>	<p>All other aspirations</p>	<p>The Director has the authority to work on fundraising efforts jointly planned with PruComm and F&D.</p>

We will conduct finance & development workshops, open to all interested congregants, to explain in some depth how church finances work.	Finance and Development Committee	2024 - Spring and forward	Workshop materials: outlines, etc.	All other aspirations	Workshops are helpful and well attended.
Finance & Development will create and empower a small squad of "connected" people who will work systematically to figure out how to pull in outside grant money. This squad will create an inventory of the grant-funding opportunities for FirstU (and submission-date calendar) along with pursuing the best opportunities for current and future grant funding. Our aspiration to become a church for the city will be clearly indicated in our outreach to civic-minded grant makers.	Finance and Development Committee President & Treasurer Director of Operations Possible outside expert	2023 - Fall and forward	Possible paid consultant Understanding of grant funding sources	All other aspirations	Grant applications are submitted and we learn more about the process in relation to outside grant funding
We will plan and execute a successful capital campaign to achieve both near-term and long-term capital upgrades that match and support our primary aspirations in programming and ministry.					
ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
The Finance & Development Committee, together with senior staff, will gather information on all that is known about successful church capital campaigns and	Finance & Development Committee	2023 - Fall and forward	Database of resources that concern church capital campaigns	All other aspirations	Capital campaign plan is created & communicated broadly. Progress

their basic phases, such as scaling, explaining, adopting, and executing.	Director of Operations				indicators are created and met.
The Finance & Development Committee will work with staff to address the question of retaining an outside consultant, weighing both advantages and disadvantages of doing so. Any consultant who is retained will be thoroughly briefed on the church and its culture and its major strategic aspirations.	Finance & Development Committee Director of Operations	2023 - Fall and forward	Possible significant consultant's fee	All other aspirations	Definite informed decision is made regarding use of a consultant
The Finance & Development Committee will assemble a Capital Campaign Team with the support of the Prudential Committee.	Finance & Development Committee Prudential Committee Director of Operations	2023 - Fall and forward	None identified	All other aspirations	Team is created and its charge is written, well understood, and broadly communicated.
The Campaign Team will build a comprehensive campaign plan and campaign timeline, which will include milestones, deliverables and activities.	Campaign Team Finance & Development Committee Director of Operations Consultant (if any)	2023 - Fall and forward	calendarizing Best practice resources for campaign success	All other aspirations	Timeline is created and broadly communicated

The Campaign Team will adopt a robust and appealing theme that connects directly back to the energy/ purpose expressed by many on and since the Big Day.	Campaign Team Consultant (if any) Finance & Development Committee	2024 - Spring and forward	Best practice resources for campaign success	All other aspirations	Theme is created and broadly communicated
The Campaign Team will canvass lead gifts and grants representing one third to one half of the desired amount before publicly launching the campaign.	Campaign Team Senior Minister	2024 - Spring and forward	pitch points for these initial asks	All other aspirations	The Campaign team obtains commitments for one half of the target amount.
We will expand and “rightsize” church staff in close relation to our growth and programming goals.					
ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
Working with denominational staff and others, the Prudential Committee will research best practices that currently prevail in other congregations of roughly our size.	Prudential Committee HR Liaison	2023 - Fall and forward	UUA sources	All other aspirations	Prudential Committee is fully up to speed on best practices
The Prudential Committee will link staffing to the tasks that need doing (including strategic plan-related tasks	Prudential Committee	2024 - Spring and forward	None identified	All other aspirations	Prudential Committee creates progress markers
Working with the senior minister, the Prudential Committee will seek candidates for full-time positions who are capable of multi-tasking: e.g., a Religious Education	Senior Minister Interim RE Director	2023 - Fall (RE)	Possible job advertising expense	All other aspirations	Searches proceed in a brisk and effective manner

Director who helps develop weekday adult learning experiences along with Sunday School, or a Music Director who effectively also functions as an arts curator in regard to how we program a renovated auditorium.	Search Committees Prudential Committee	2024 – Fall (Music)	Compelling job descriptions		
Working with the Finance and Development Committee, the Prudential Committee will begin to project future staff growth in relation to church growth in both numbers and financial support and also in relation to likely investment and inflation trends over five-year intervals.	Finance and Development Committee Prudential Committee	2023 - Fall and forward	Case studies from other churches	All other aspirations	Prudential Committee will have in hand a sound estimate of likely future personnel costs
We will achieve “state of the art” communications capacity and social media visibility for a church of our size and ambition.					
ACTION	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CONNECTIONS	PROGRESS INDICATORS
A task force led by the Director of Operations will work up a template for what “state of the art” communications looks like in today’s church context. They will identify examples of churches that now have an impressive online and social media presence along with an appealing and consistent “look” in their communications. Special emphasis will be placed on the development of a comprehensive and highly	Director of Operations Ad Hoc Communications Task Force	2023 - Fall and forward	Examples of churches with outstanding online impact	All other aspirations	Task force has a real sense of what “state of the art” looks like Congregants respond positively to the comprehensive event calendar

visible calendar that features both known and anticipated events occurring within the First U church year. The calendar will include events occurring in our spaces that are sponsored by outside groups along with events sponsored by First U.					
The plan will address what “rapid response” communications capabilities First U might build to create greater capacity for addressing in-the-moment developments, emergencies, and other unplanned and important developments. “Rapid response” tools might include phone trees, social media, email, and others.	Ad Hoc Communications Task Force Director of Operations	2024 - Fall and forward	Examples of positive rapid response capabilities of other churches	All other aspirations	Congregants respond positively to this new capability
The communications task force will bring in outside specialist consultants, with Prudential Committee approval.	Ad Hoc Communications Task Force	2024 - Spring and forward	Possible consultant fee	All other aspirations	Any possible consultant is retained
The task force will recommend, and the Prudential Committee will review and approve, a comprehensive communications and media plan, including a clear explanation of the budget and staffing implications.	Ad Hoc Communications Task Force Prudential Committee	2024 - Fall and forward	Formatting templates for a media plan	All other aspirations	Plan is reviewed and accepted by Prudential Committee

APPENDIX 1: SIXTEEN OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED BY THE CONGREGATION, APRIL 29, 2023

Pathway A: Enhancing Community

1. We will continue and deepen our training and resources on welcome and inclusion and full accessibility for our whole congregation, and especially our key leaders and volunteers.
2. We will fully commit to becoming an anti-racist church.
3. We will expand opportunities for simple fun and creating connection through multigenerational events.
4. We will deepen our knowledge of each other through sharing stories, interests, & skills.

Pathway B: Transforming Ourselves

1. We will explore the role of Sunday services (words/music/silence) and the Meeting House in support of deepening individual and collective spirituality.
2. We will continue to reflect on stories that help deepen our spiritual selves, including Native American & Greek myths, and personal and world stories, as opposed to a narrower UU point of view.
3. We will explore the role of joy in sustaining a robust spiritual life.
4. We will explore the intersectionality of spirituality and justice, including *radical nonviolence* as a spiritual practice.

Pathway C: Doing the Work of Justice

1. We will become a church for the city in multiple ways and strengthen our presence and impact at city and state levels.
2. We will form stronger and better partnerships with groups and movements whose commitments match ours, thus amplifying our agency and collective voice as First U.
3. We will root our social justice and reparation work in our own congregation's troubled history.
4. We will expand our multicultural and multi-ethnic congregation.

Pathway D: Building Our Capacity

1. We will identify, select, prioritize and resolve major capital needs, such as: improve and maintain our sound system, kitchen, organ, accessibility in the Meeting House, a redesigned dais, improved parking, glass doors in the RE space, etc. with a capital campaign sufficient to meet our priorities and provide for proper maintenance.
2. We will strengthen our church's development strategies, such as our planned giving program, annual giving, capital campaigns, grants, and other revenue generation sources.
3. We will increase staffing as needed to realize our goals and to be in alignment with established best practices, such as kitchen staff, full-time music director, full-time pastoral minister, and communications support.
4. We will develop a culture of participation and responsibility for the church that broadens our volunteer base.

APPENDIX 2: SWOT ANALYSIS CONDUCTED BY THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

STRENGTHS:

- Significant endowment
- Capable staff, gifted senior minister
- Rich community - diverse gifts of members
- Dedicated volunteers for leadership and programs
- Desire to do good work
- Buildings, infrastructure
- Physical location, geography
- Optimism
- Openness to change
- Rich musical life
- Rich history
- Support for our strategic planning

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Social justice leadership in city and state
- Openness to greater financial stewardship
- Surrounded by college students
- Widespread craving for more diversity
- Physical space to grow - capacious meeting house
- This strategic plan's potential
- Bringing spiritual depth to social justice
- More youth-oriented programming
- Greater coherence in our public-facing work
- Open staff positions (music & RE)

WEAKNESSES:

- Resistance to change
- Homogeneity, older demographic
- Fragmentation within congregation
- Parsimonious spirit
- Expense of maintaining old buildings
- Lack of mission clarity
- Inadequate sound system
- Sunday services follow traditional, Protestant-inspired format
- Lack of parking
- Rigid, inflexible layout of meeting house
- Fissures in social justice work
- Staff turnover - open staff positions (music & RE)

THREATS:

- Lack of self-awareness (as to how "white" we are)
- "Yankee thrift"
- Resistance to change, potential for backlash
- Siloed into factions
- Lots of talk, not much action
- Age of congregation, risk of obsolescence
- We are a "well-kept secret" in the city
- Not much midweek programming
- Clarifying balance of authority between minister(s) and lay leadership as the church continues to grow.
- Conflicts around Sunday Service music - traditional vs. contemporary