

MISSION STATEMENT GUIDELINES and SAMPLES

Adapted from Robert T. Latham, "Moving On from Church Folly Lane"

I. Community through PURPOSE

"The religious mission of a congregation must be clear and inspiringly stated. It must be elevated as the first priority of every agent of the congregation's ministry. It must invoke commitment to a commonly held "outside our own skin" nobility that transcends personal or small group agenda. It is such a purpose that empowers a profoundness of bonding that survives the fragility of ego need and the competitive spirit of lesser agendas. Without this kind of mission orientation the Program Congregation may fragment into a multiplicity of self-focused and value inflated groups competing for the congregation's attention and resources."

II. Mission Statement GUIDELINES

A mission-covenant statement is bounded by two related perimeters. It should contain

1. As much information as necessary to make clear its intentions.
2. No more information than is necessary to make clear its intentions.

A powerful statement that actually motivates members is short enough to be memorized and inspiring enough to be advertised in a wide variety of ways as a reminder of why the congregation exists. Such a statement will rarely exceed seventy-five to eighty words. The following five elements embody the essential components of a clear and inspiring religious mission statement:

1. Identity of People – The opening phrase of the statement should identify the people who are forming the covenant. Who are the people of the covenant? What label distinguishes these people from all other people?

2. Focus of Mission – Following the opening identity phrase, the statement should indicate the mission of the covenanting *group*. For what purpose are the people gathered in covenant? For what purpose does any religious institution exist? **Why is our Beloved Community a *religious* community?**

3. Source of Authority – Where is the locus of authority for creating the covenant and pursuing the mission? What governs and validates the group's existence? How does the group know what it knows?

4. Posture toward Truth – In what manner do the people of the covenant relate to reality? Is their body of truth living or dogmatized? What is the style of the covenanting group? Is the style open or closed to further truth?

5. Means of Fulfillment – The closing sentence of the statement should indicate how the covenant is going to be transformed into reality. This involves an indication of the intentions of the covenanting group and the resource means by which this intention will be fulfilled. What is the pledge of the group toward making its mission real in the world? What form and level of commitment binds the group to their common mission?

Derived from studying past UU and secular statements, these five elements produce powerful mission-covenant statements because they minimize inserting private agendas into the process, place everyone on the same page re: the statement model, minimize confusion between Mission and Ministry, and create a statement of social identity.

III. Common PITFALLS to a Successful Mission Statement

- ‘Mission’ is our shared purpose as a religious institution or WHY our community exists as a *religious* community. ‘Ministry’ is everything we do to support the Mission or WHAT we do as a religious community. If we confuse Ministry (what) for Mission (why), then we mistakenly produce a ministry listing rather than a clear and inspiring Mission Statement.
- A Mission Statement for a church is a statement of shared *religious community* purpose, not a listing of personal purposes for wanting community. If we confuse personal purposes for being here with our common purpose as a religious community, then we mistakenly produce personal agenda listings rather than a clear, inspiring Mission Statement. *Think like a Church* to invoke “outside our own skin” nobility!
- With an unclear or uninspiring Mission Statement, a confused congregation can wander with an unfocused and ineffective ministry, out of touch with its purpose and with each other, stuck in the past, unmotivated, uninspired, unappealing to current and new members alike.
- Community is a genuine need in us all, but ‘community’ is not a *religious* mission. Community is an outcome that arises naturally from social relations. *What kind of community do we envision?* Beloved Community arises from right relations illuminated by a clear and inspiring religious mission. Community arising from a deeply shared sense of religious purpose is profoundly bonded community!
- Social action is also a genuine need, but ‘social action’ is not a religious mission. Social action is *ministry*, a healthy natural strategy to support a successful religious mission. Social action focused and driven by shared religious purpose is truly empowered action!
- Growth is not a religious mission. Again, growth is a healthy natural outcome of fulfilling a successful religious mission. In fact, the only growth strategy that most churches need is a clear and inspiring common mission effectively engaged.
- Diversity is not a religious mission. A genuine religious mission will minister to individual needs while transcending individual agendas through shared purpose. *Unity*, motivated and inspired by a *shared* sense of religious mission, is the true strength of a religious community!
- Adherence to tradition is not a religious mission. Tradition and ritual are genuine needs, but rigid tradition as a ministry strategy hinders personal and community transformation in a changing world. Do not allow the “winds of change” to extinguish an irrelevant UU Chalice!
- A RELIGIOUS MISSION *IS* about sharing experiences of the sacred and illuminating right relations for personal and community transformation. In fact, the mission of religious institutions has not changed significantly for millennia! Our challenge is to express the religious mission of the FirstU Toronto in our own clear and inspiring words. See accompanying **Mission Statement SAMPLES. IV. SUMMARY**

A successful Mission Statement for a religious institution

1. is a *mission* statement, neither a ministry listing nor a personal agenda listing;
2. *motivates* the congregation’s resource commitments toward mission fulfillment;
3. is a *religious* mission, not some other mission for a different kind of group.

“Remember that leadership makes everything happen that’s going to happen.” --Robert Latham

V. Mission Statement SAMPLES

United States Mission Statement

We the people of the United States (*identity of people*), in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity (*focus of mission*), do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America (*covenant – what follows is generally a statement as to how this mission will be fulfilled*).

Jefferson Unitarian Church, Golden, Colorado (1990)

We, the members of the Jefferson Unitarian Church (*identity of people*), are engaged in a free and open search for truth (*posture toward truth*).

We seek enlightenment from human heritage and life experience and find inspiration in uniquely personal ways (*source of authority*).

We covenant to live those transforming truths, which bring spiritual wholeness and harmony to personal, global, and universal relationships and thereby inspire hope for the future (*focus of mission*). To this end we commit our combined actions and personal resources (*means of fulfillment*).

Mission Statement of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton, New Jersey (*identity of people*)

We come together in a free and open search for meaning within the mysteries of life (*focus of mission*). We draw inspiration from the wisdom of the ages (*posture toward truth*), guided by reason, intuition, and experience (*source of authority*).

Transformed through our shared explorations, we are compelled to build a better world in harmony with all existence (*focus of mission*).

We commit to love, respect, and nurture each other in our lifelong spiritual journeys. We pledge our hearts and hands, our minds and means to this sacred bond (*means of fulfillment*).

USS Enterprise (NCC-1701)

SPACE: The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.