Reflections on First UU of Ann Arbor:
What's Next on Our Way

Part 1 – Introduction: Getting Out Our Walking Shoes
by Marion Holt

The longest journey begins with a single step, and we are reaching the walking stage.

Over the transition time at first UU we have held a mirror up to ourselves to see more clearly what we valued in our past here and what we would like our future to look like.

Through an appreciative inquiry process that we called the Sankofa Project we compiled over l,000 file cards of your ideas, thoughts and memories and distilled them into a document describing your aspirations for the future of this congregation, the document titled "Provocative Proposals." We expect to use this document to inspire us into the next era for our congregation.

There are printed copies of the Provocative Proposals at the Involvement table or you can find them on the uuaa.org website. They describe what we want our Community, our Social Action, our Spiritual Development programs, our Resources and our Culture to look like 5,l0, 20 years from now.

The process of Appreciative Inquiry has four phases: DISCOVER, DREAM, DESIGN, AND DELIVER.
We have learned a lot from our phases of Discovery and Dreaming. We are ready to Design ways to actualize these hopes and ideas and Deliver them into reality.

The Board and Program Council considered the proposals, set priorities and developed implementation plans at their winter retreat which they will present to us this morning.

Put on your walking shoes.

Part 2 – Spiritual Development
by Margaret Dawson Pekarek

We understand from the appreciative inquiry process that this congregation values spiritual development. We are old and young, from backgrounds diverse in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and life experience, seeking truth and meaning in life.

We quest for spiritual development in many ways, including study, conversation, and worship. Many programs in our Congregation, District and Association serve these

needs. Some of those are relationships we develop in our service to the Congregation and in small groups, the lay- and minister- classes, the sermons and words spoken and the music we make and share.

We propose that:

1. At Community Gatherings/RE Nights we hold worship services in format and content different from our Sunday morning services, drawing on multi-cultural/multi-racial traditions as well as what we normally think of as traditional Unitarian-Universalist worship practices. We look for worship to draw us deeper into relationship with each other, with our internal selves and with our Earth. As we work in the secular domain to save our planet and to remove racism and bias from our world, we will find spiritual nourishment through our worship experiences at First UU Congregation.
2. We recognize the importance of music in our spiritual lives as it provides a path to our hearts, and therefore we bring more music into all of our worship services.
3. We offer the experience of meditation to our Congregation by providing a dedicated Meditation Room and guidance in pursuing this form of spiritual practice.
4. Understanding that our social justice work must be done in a context of sustaining life on earth for all people, including and perhaps especially those marginalized in today's society, we touch our relationship with the earth in our worship with the assistance of our professional ministry, our worship associates, our religious educators and our musicians.
5. We convene a task force to explore these ideas, to connect with the youth and young adults, including those working on the Chalice Services, and to make specific recommendations for long-term implementation of these and other ideas.

Part 3 – Community
by Spencer Thomas

From among the many visions of our community in the Sankofa "provocative proposals", we selected two.

> At First UU we "do not check our brains at the door" but enter a place where we can "address things we can't address elsewhere." We find involvement with others who share our liberal religious values exciting and energizing.

We will select a book related to the study topic "Embracing our Planet" for a "congregational read." Our goal is to have many diverse, small groups meeting at different times and places, and to involve one fifth of the congregation over the next year. Imagine the conversations that will emerge in the social hall, at pot-luck dinners, and whenever UUs encounter one another in daily life. We see this dovetailing neatly with the action plan that Terry Madden will talk about in a few minutes.

> Anyone in the congregation of any age has the opportunity to join in small long-term covenant groups that are led by trained lay ministers.

Our clergy are already working with some of us on starting small group ministries. Our goal is that, within 5 years, participation in such a group will become the "norm" for members of the congregation, rather than something new and unusual. In these groups, we will explore and discover our own spirituality in ways that are not possible in a large Sunday service. In these groups, we will come to know our fellow group members in a deep and meaningful way, forming friendships that will enrich our community over the long term.

If you read the Provocative Proposals, you will see many other community-related ideas. We hope that you will be inspired to choose one and work towards make it a reality.

Part 4 – Stewardship of Our Resources
written by Lauren Helwig and Tim Richards
and presented by
Tim Richards (9:30 service) and
Lauren Helwig (11:30 service)

A key theme that surfaced repeatedly in the Sankofa process is the notion of stewardship -- our shared responsibility to contribute to and care for this liberal religious community by caring for our resources and by giving our time, our treasure and our talents in service to each other, our congregation's ministry and the interdependent web of existence.

We propose the following long-term stewardship goal:
To create a Sustainable Future, by prudent and responsible care of our Finances, our Building and Grounds, and our Programs, so that FUUCAA is a model of and a resource for sustainability in the larger community. Success in this long-term goal will necessitate the ongoing attention of this congregation to the meaning and value of stewardship and a concentrated stewardship campaign.

Specific outcomes that will build toward this long-term stewardship goal include a sound, long-term Financial Plan; a remediated acoustic system (and other accessibility remedies) and a Building and Grounds program that models sustainability.

Within the context of the long-term stewardship goal, we propose this immediate short-term goal as an essential first step:

To develop and implement an Online scheduling system, including an interactive calendar. The specific outcomes from this effort will be a single-location representation of building use, involvement opportunities and FUUCAA-supported external events to foster and sustain an engaged congregation, member-program integration and effective communication.

Part 5 – Culture
written by Pete Mooney and Cathy Doherty and
presented by Cathy Doherty

One definition of culture is that it includes patterns of activity and symbols that give an activity significance. The culture of this congregation incorporates both our commitment to reason and, at the same time, an effort to reach our hearts – as well as our minds. A way of bringing different intellectual and spiritual viewpoints into our services would be to approach themes of great importance from different perspectives.

At the recent Board and Program Council retreat, we discussed incorporating the issue of global warming into our congregational life. Global warming could be integrated into our services from a variety of different perspectives whether humanist, atheist, Christian, pagan or any other spiritual path followed within our congregation. One service might include a voice from among the membership discussing the dangers of climate change from a scientific perspective. Another service might include a sermon addressing the importance of protecting the environment from a spiritual perspective. The goal would be to illuminate a theme or issue while allowing different theological points of view to be heard.

Looking at our culture, we also discussed the challenge of increasing the diversity of our congregation. Although we often talk about reaching out to people of color, our makeup remains largely white and middle class. We ***can*** increase the diversity of our congregation. In the past, when we made a concerted effort to reach out to gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered people we saw significant increase in membership from those communities.

It is the conclusion and hope of the "culture" discussion group that if we were to refocus our efforts on increasing the proportion of our congregation that is made up of racial, ethnic, and other minorities we could make significant progress. Because we believe that setting objectives increases the chance of achieving a goal, we suggest that the Board study the issue and set a specific, reasonable percentage goal – based on Ann Arbor area demographics – for increasing our diversity in the near future.

Part 6 – Social Action
by Terry Madden

From the Sankofa Project's "Social Action" category comes an inviting and challenging two year plan based on the 7th UU principle -
"Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

We propose to listen to Lester Brown's Plan B which asks us to rescue a planet under stress and a civilization in trouble.
We propose to provide an organizational structure, an underpinning, that will enable us to coordinate our efforts to have, as William McDonough puts it,
"Humans serve as a tool of nature."

For two years we will consciously celebrate Planet Earth by exploring with ourselves and our neighbors for ways to live in harmony with nature.

We will energize ourselves and the planet in efforts that will call upon all of us to take an active role in respecting the interdependent web of all existence.

Our three immediate objectives are:
1) To form a "Think Tank" which will review our outline of a plan to celebrate our whole earth community, locally, nationally, and globally. We are developing a plan, one that will capture the imagination of the First UU Congregation;

2) On February 20 the First UU Program Council approved our plan and on March 6 we hope to win approval from the Board to "Celebrate the Planet - Plan B" a plan to mobilize over 75 UU members to make a commitment to join action groups that will identify steps to celebrate life on Planet Earth;

3) At the May Congregational meeting, to invite the whole First UU Congregation to say "Yes!" for us to move forward with our two year plan which will encourage us as individuals, as members of the First UU, as a UU denomination, and as citizens of Ann Arbor, of Michigan, and of the world to act purposefully to celebrate our appreciation and our awe of Planet Earth through a plan that is bold enough to express our "Audacity of Hope."

Our plan has two phases,
phase 1, the formation of small groups to study and discuss Lester Brown's Plan B; and
phase 2, to create action teams to identify tasks that will unify us in living our UU Principles.

To receive a copy of the current plan to "Celebrate the Planet - Plan B", stop by at the Social Action table in the Social Hall.
To be a leader, to get involved, sign up today!
Together - the clear sky's the limit!