

Dear Selection Committee:

We have benefitted greatly from the process of applying for this grant from the BCD for the Congregation Futures program. We thank you for giving us a framework to survey and assess the vital building blocks for the future of our congregation.

Representatives from all walks of our church life and ministries participated in this application process. More than a dozen leaders met over several weeks to complete this document. We surveyed congregants in writing and we talked with “peripheral” and former members. One-third of our congregants answered the written survey.

Our church has so much promise. We feel we’re on the brink of expansion into a bigger, more robust, liberal spiritual center serving a wider community in a society in greater need of Unitarian Universalism than ever. We recognize this vision presents opportunities as well as challenges. The Congregational Futures Program can help us develop a plan to build on our strengths and manage the challenges of growth and change.

Since calling our current minister four years ago, we have gradually added to the membership rolls, with a focus on individuals, relationships and organizational health. Yet, our numerical growth lags behind the population growth in Kingston and surrounding towns. If people driving down Main Street past our church only knew what they are missing! Inside is a community of caring and hope. There is time for silence, reflection, a moment of inspiration—not to mention the best music in town.

In the past half-dozen years alone, we’ve become a Welcoming Congregation and a model to the community for green facilities with high-profile solar and efficiency installations. We are connected in proximity and growing collaboration with two Unitarian Universalist churches in neighboring towns.

However, without assistance from something like the BCD Congregation Futures grant program we will be slow to reach our potential. We see a bright future and need help getting there.

We believe we have the groundwork for significant growth in membership and furtherance of our great Unitarian Universalist mission. What will hold us back is a lack of goal-setting, strategy, and communication. The resources and guidance involved in participating in the Congregations Futures program will help our congregation reach its aspirations. We are hungry to use our good efforts and our improving health as spring boards to the next level.

Many thanks for your consideration of this request,

Paula Fisher, Bob Erlandsen, Fran Pickett, *Leadership and Administration Ministry*

Donna Eldridge, *Education Ministry*

Sue Garland and Kristina Cole Randall, *Outreach Ministry*

Charlotte Simpson & Ed Bielecki, *Social Justice Ministry*

Bob Kostka, *Stewardship Ministry*

Tom Augello, *Music Ministry*

Kris Page and Joan Thompson, *Worship Ministry*

Rev. Dan King, Minister

Congregation Futures Program Application

Ballou Channing District
 325 W. Elm Street, Brockton, MA 02301 508-559-6650

bcdoffice@verizon.net

Part 1 General Information

Congregation Information	
Name First Congregational Parish in Kingston	
Address 222-224 Main Street	
City, Kingston State, MA Zip 02364	
Phone 781 585-3051	
E-mail kingstonuu@comcast.net	
Contact Information For Person Completing the Application	
Name Paula Fisher	
Position Parish Committee Chair	
Address 31 River Street	
City, Kingston State, MA Zip 02364	
Phone 781 585-9265	
E-mail bragg48@yahoo.com	
Background Information About Your Congregation	
Certified Adult Membership 2011	_____ 117.
Regularly Active "Friends" 2011	_____ 15.
Operating Budget FY2011	_____ \$173,310.
• Percent from canvass	_____ 43%.
• Percent from endowment	_____ 15%.
Does the congregation have:	
a. Children Religious Education program	* Yes ___ No ___ # of registered children <u>30</u>
b. Youth program	* Yes ___ No ___ # of involved youth <u>9</u>
Annual Program Fund payment in 2010	Full payment * Yes ___ No ___
BCD Congregation Contribution payment in 2010	Full payment * Yes ___ No ___
Congregation Needs Survey	
The information provided in the Congregation Needs Survey will assist the selection committee in awarding the grants. Please Complete Part 1 and Part 2 of the Congregation Needs Survey and attach submit along with this cover page. The application can be sent to the BCD office as a Word document attached to an email (BallouChanning@verizon.net) or by hard copy to BCD Office, 325 West Elm Street, Brockton, MA 02301	
Affirmation	
By signing, I state that (1) I am an authorized representative of this organization; (2) the governing body voted to participate in the program (3) the results of the evaluation were shared with the congregation (4) the congregation will be able to start and continue this project/program over the next 12 to 18 months should it receive the grant; (5) grant funds will not be co-mingled with church funds; (6) the church leadership will work with a district representative to engage in periodic updates on the status of the project. (7) the church will follow through on making operational or systematic changes that are recommended by the consultant or learnings from trainings taken by church leaders (8) the church will make a final report to the District Executive at the end of the project.	
Signature: Paula B. Fisher	
Position: Parish Committee Chair	Date 10/31/11

Congregation Needs Survey

Part 1. Self Appraisal

The questions in this section are designed to help you determine what might be problems, blockages or barriers to fully realizing your potential or may be causing a decline in your congregation's health and vitality. By looking at the answers you may be able to better assess what you may wish to address with the help of consultant(s) or training should your congregation be selected to receive a \$4000 grant. Please answer the following questions succinctly, but with enough detail for the review team to have an understanding about your congregation.

Identity

1. What is your self-image, that is, how do you describe yourself as a congregation?

We are a warm, friendly, open congregation, welcoming to those who come through our doors. We provide an accepting atmosphere and opportunities for spiritual comfort and growth. We are as proud of our older congregants as we are of our youth who bring us such a wonderful view of our future. We are adaptive to the changing world and cognizant of our need to change with it. Our Music Ministry, one of our strengths, enriches our Sunday Services with both traditional and contemporary music. We have taken several other steps in this direction with our music program, energy conservation, social justice and maintenance of current membership.

2. What is the niche of this church, that is, what is the primary need you are trying to serve or are best at serving?

There is a spirit of cooperation throughout the congregation that allows new ideas to be developed and completed. As a spiritual home for all souls we consider ourselves to be a support group for living life. We are best at offering a variety of spiritual opportunities, so that many different needs are met.

3. What is the driving motivation for this congregation, that is, if asked what would people say is the reason this congregation exists?

- **To bring a liberal voice to public notice by living our seven UU principles to the best of our ability**
- **To celebrate life's passages in our congregation and to comfort those in need**
- **To provide guidance for developing our individual spirituality**
- **To guide our youth in their developmental years toward an understanding of the responsibilities of being a part of this liberal voice**
- **To seek ways to help us get this voice heard**

Membership

1. What is the age distribution of the membership?

under 35:	3	65-70:	12
35-40:	7	70-75:	8
40-45:	3	75-80:	7
45-50:	19	80-85:	4
50-55:	11	85-90:	4
55-60:	14	90+:	1
60-65:	24		

2. What are the sources of new members?

We believe our number one source for new members is our congregation's awareness of the importance of welcoming new faces. Some years ago our interim minister pointed out our lack of consistent attention to newcomers as a weakness and his admonition was taken very seriously. Many in the congregation transmit a welcome attitude and create a model for others who become one with us, perpetuating this valuable skill.

Our congregation conducts many fellowship events throughout the year where the public is invited and congregants are encouraged to bring their friends and neighbors. Our event signage on the grounds of our facilities is in a high-traffic area offering us free "PR".

The need by some for more than just Sunday-morning services, September through June, was filled by members of the Worship Ministry. A mid-week Contemplative Worship Service and the addition of summer services have attracted many visitors, some of whom are now active in the congregation.

Although more difficult to assess, our web site www.kingstonuu.org has brought in three new participants that we know of and perhaps more.

We must stress too that our Minister and his Wife possess all the right qualities "church-shoppers" are looking for. Many who have been a part of this congregation for decades and have seen a variety of ministers come & go during that period feel our last search brought us just who we needed, when we needed them.

Like many UU churches our RE program is a draw for parents looking for religious education for their children and our Minister is involved in many community activities including spreading our UU values and works with a neighboring UU church on a local radio program.

3. How many first-time visitor come to the church each week and how many return for a 2nd and 3rd time soon after their first visit?

We estimate 2-5 new visitors a month, some as guests attending with friends and members and others searching. On average about one half or 2 come back a 2nd and 3rd time. Over the past 5 years (4 with our current Minister and one during an Interim period) we have averaged 10 new members a year. Of those 50 new members, 43 are still active; 4 have moved away, 2 have become inactive and 1 has died, indicating a high retention factor and that we are doing things right! If they are welcomed, and realize they are UUs during our interaction with them, they remain and become a vital part of our community.

Community

1. How do others in the community see the congregation? Are you happy with that image?

In the town of Kingston, our congregation is often seen as a trusted community fixture, whose profile is amplified by its place in time (literally "First" Parish) and physical location (Main Street, connected to the town green, old town hall, town cemetery, etc.)

Yet non-members see us sometimes as non-religious or a little kooky, possibly Moonies. We're the "free-thinkers." Some of this may be good, but we are not entirely happy with this image. We would like to promote better clarity about UU principles. We would like to be a stronger beacon for promoting liberal religious values, and providing a refuge for people leaving behind more traditional, conservative dogma that doesn't suit them. We need to leverage public events on our property, and member participation in events outside the church that align with our principles.

2. What expectations about life in this congregation do you project to the larger community? **We project too little right now. When we do, we project a liberal view of what church can be. Embedded in this is our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being that fosters a welcoming atmosphere. We expect members to find a safe place for their personal, individual spiritual exploration without judgment or dogma. We provide social opportunities with fun events and other activities that promote community. We are welcoming and caring about each other and the world.**

3. In your community, what are reasonable populations to target to get involved in this church? **We believe significant numbers of residents in Kingston, Pembroke, Plympton, Marshfield, and Halifax are Unitarians but don't know it yet. We need to let people know what we do and believe. In particular, we want to focus on young families, and those newly settled in the area, as well as young, single adults looking for a shackles-free religion. Empty Nesters with a need for spiritual, meaningful connections will find them here at First Congregational Parish. More targeted groups include any of our rental clients, including groups with monthly events and wedding/funeral clients. Participants in our public fundraisers on our property should also have a better awareness of some basic features of our faith. Finally, members of the public at large who are dedicated to social justice could be attracted to our philosophy via public events at our facilities, such as panel discussions and lectures.**

Philosophy and operations

1 On a 1 to 7 scale, to what extent: (give the reason for your rating)

- a) Does the board/parish committee see its role as to readily give permission for new initiatives, or to withhold permission unless a very persuasive argument can be made on behalf of the new ministry/project?

[1 fairly permissive....7 significantly restrictive]

Most of our congregation sees the decision-making process as fairly permissive. Evidence cited included new initiatives like the greening program and frequent communication in the newsletter keeping people informed.

- b) Are decisions made on the assumption there is scarcity or that there is an abundance of available or potential resources that could be tapped?

[1 with the lens of scarcity....7 with the lens of abundance/potential abundance]

The results from this question showed a wide variety of opinions from the parishioners. While a sizable number of responses existed in the extremes, the majority polled felt there was no assumption about resources. When a valued project comes before our community, resources seem "readily available" mostly because of the people "who ... follow through." Over the past few years, major initiatives have been proposed, funded, and completed. While the financial cost has been large, creative individuals have come together to make these projects happen.

- c) Is the priority of this congregation care of existing members or looking outward to bring Unitarian Universalism to the larger community and encourage people to become involved in the life of the congregation?

[1 care of existing members....7 outward looking to those not in the church yet]

Thankfully, our congregation saw these two priorities as "not mutually exclusive." Many respondents deviated from the traditional one choice and chose two seemingly contradictory values. Many parishioners saw this as a "big strength of the culture of this community" to be able to care for our large population of older, existing members, but maintain a vibrant program for new members including religious education for children and adults. Many activities focus on the traditions of the community but also engage those who will be the future of the church.

- d) From your real past experience would you say your church is a monument to honor the past (building, ministries, programs) or a religious community for the future?

[1 focused on maintenance/past....7 focused on the new/future]

Relatively few parishioners saw our community as dwelling in the past. Those that did seemed to connect with the previous query about recognizing that "we must do both." We have to see where and who we once were while keeping our combined vision focused on the future. A vast majority felt strongly that we have a commitment to the future of our church and in the community where we live.

- 2 What has the congregation done recently to improve its operations, ministries, finances/fund raising, membership, and sense of self and its potential?

Over the past few years our congregation has undertaken many new initiatives beginning with the calling of our new minister, Dan King and his Wife, Nina four years ago. They have helped initiate many new goals while infusing our community with energy. Under their combined tutelage, our church has become more outwardly focused while still reinforcing the needs of the membership that is our foundation. Some of our recent accomplishments include...

- **making being a Fair Share church a priority as opposed to an afterthought**
- **becoming a green community by investing in efficiency improvements to our aging campus and installing solar modules on one of our buildings**
- **completing the requirements to become a Welcoming Congregation**
- **establishing a rigorous Coming of Age program rich in experience for church youth and the mentors paired with them**
- **implementing an OWL (Our Whole Lives) program for adolescents**
- **offering opportunities for leadership retreats and financial assistance in attending General Assemblies**
- **the extending of our ministry programs through summer and Wednesday evening services**
- **2010 revision of bylaws moving us in the direction of organizing committees into ministries, making ministries an intentional means to implement our mission.**

Life in the church

1. How would you rate the *esprit de corps* of the congregation in general? How is this *esprit* reflected in levels of pledging? How is this *esprit* reflected in members' willingness to volunteer?
- A. **Currently the congregation has outstanding *esprit de corps*. The real strength of this congregation is the way we care for each other, pull together for events and personal and community crises, and come out in force to participate in our Renewal House (the shelter for battered women and their children in Roxbury) social-action activities. The connection built with Renewal House has inspired neighboring UU congregations to participate in this ministry together with us.**
- B. How is this *esprit de corps* reflected in levels of pledging?
Although perhaps difficult to truly assess, in this economy, where many other churches reflect a drop in pledges, we have more than held our own. We have not had a year of decreased pledges in quite some time, and have had a couple of years of double-digit percentage increases. However, given the relative financial health of our membership, we still must use endowment funds to help with the operating budget thus reflecting the double-edged role of the endowment where some people think they can slack on giving because we have the endowment to fall back on. But to directly answer this question, capital campaigns

to repair a chimney, replace the heating systems in three buildings, install solar modules on our church hall, and replace appliances in the parsonage and church hall with energy-efficient units, were enthusiastically supported and we were able to accomplish those projects in a very short period of time. The congregation, once informed and educated as to the need, responded and raised the necessary funds from their personal investments.

C. How is this esprit reflected in members' willingness to volunteer?

Staffing committees, recruiting leaders for religious education activities and, in general, doing the routine work of the church is often a struggle. People will agree to volunteer if asked directly by someone and given a specific task to carry out with a rough estimate of the time commitment. All committees have to recruit people, since few outright volunteer for an open-ended commitment. But events like the Renewal House Christmas Party and Summer Campout, leaf raking, pie making for our holiday fair, help in running the fair and other fundraisers, paint parties, etc., are usually well staffed with enthusiastic members who genuinely enjoy working with each other. These events show us at our very best and few people say no when recruited!

2. How would you evaluate the church in the four areas of congregational growth over the past few years

a) maturational (helping members grow in their faith and deepen spiritual/religious roots)

This past year the Worship Ministry team initiated well-received and still well-attended Wednesday evening "Recharge" soup/dinner services. The purpose was to deepen the spiritual growth and development of the congregation and attract visitors. With a veteran settled minister and his wife (who together are active and integral participants), an outstanding music program, and a solid RE program, our congregation has grown increasingly more spiritual over the past several years.

b) organic (building community, having effective operational structures, stable network of human relationships)

We have consistently built a strong spiritual community with creative services offered by our Worship Ministry. We feel, however, we can do some work on building more effective operational structures, and more engagement from more people to lighten the work load of the leadership and committee chairs.

c) embodiment (bringing Unitarian Universalism and our way of seeing and working in the world into the larger community)

Our minister, Dan King, is a very active participant in the greater community. He has served as a leader in the Rotary Club, local Interfaith Council and participates in a weekly, Sunday-morning radio program with a neighboring UU minister. Our membership at large has a "disproportionately positive" representation at town meeting, town committees, elected town officials, and children's' activities. Members write letters to the editor, get involved in political activity, etc., supporting the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism. As a Welcoming Church, we proudly fly our rainbow flag and have, in the past, hosted forums in our meeting house or parish halls on topics like education reform, sex education, and Boy Scouts of America and their policy on scouts' sexual orientation. We have an active Social Justice Committee and congregation members are visible in "greening" initiatives, protection of the environment and anti-war protests.

d) numeric (number of new members)

We have shown steady growth since calling Rev Dan King to our pulpit. Our congregation has dramatically increased its membership over his tenure and an impressive percentage of these new comers are “sticking” with us.

3. What type of internal environmental and theological changes do you think the congregation might be facing in the next few years?

Most of our congregational leaders are veteran church people who are getting on in years. Though we have a solid, young-family base, we have a shortage of people with the time to devote to church business and growth. It remains to be seen from where the replacements for members who retire and move to warmer climates will come. In addition, our Minister too will soon be of retirement age which could have us in Search process in the not-so-distant future. The maintenance of three buildings (i.e. 1851 Meeting House, even older Parsonage & separate Parish Hall) though solid, is an on-going issue and will likely remain so.

4. Has the congregation had a major conflict in the past three years? Have the identified conflicts been resolved? If not, what issues remain?

We have had no major conflicts in the past four years. Like any collection of individuals who are free thinkers, we have our issues but none in the recent past have escalated into a major conflict. Our Minister, along with his Wife, reflects the congregations respect for each other and model compassionate listening and mindful speaking. In addition, the Parish Committee and committee chairs offer solid leadership allowing us to resolve conflict before it escalates into crisis.

Part 2. Use of Grant Money

The selection committee would like to know how you would use the grant funds if you are selected. Please answer the questions succinctly, but with enough detail for the review team to have an understanding about your congregation and why you think you would be a good candidate for this program and the grants that will be available.

1. What do you see are the number one and number two major problems/difficulties your congregation is having that are preventing it from being an especially vital center of Unitarian Universalism in your community, or are keeping it from growing?

- *Lack of true, effective communication. We wish not only to have effective internal communication but also need to foster effective external (community) communication*

In order for our congregation to move to the next level, we feel our greatest need is to gain the skills needed to effectively communicate both internally as well as externally. We are firm in our conviction that we can make effective change in the world around us if only we could leverage the individual strengths of our membership through learning positive communication. Chatting during coffee hour just doesn't seem to cut it. However, we realize there is a double edge to increased communication. We can preach all we want but we need to learn how to listen as well. Only then will we be able to take our message to the greater community without coming off as abrasive and combative. We feel we are ready to take on this challenge with the right assistance.

- *Leadership training that doesn't stop with those trained but perpetuates itself as time goes on*

Our other great area of need is to develop more and better leaders in our congregation. We are blessed with many talented and hard-working individuals willing to sacrifice of themselves for the betterment of our community. But too often, it is these same people that carry the brunt of the load. Is it possible to motivate the membership to participate more actively or do we have to

accept that only a few carry the weight? We can't believe the latter response is true. So how do we develop leadership that is effective, competent, and fairly distributed amongst our membership without alienating those we long to have at our sides? To answer that question successfully would allow us to recruit and grow our own talent pool that could perpetuate itself into the future.

2. What one change in how things are done or in congregation life would have the greatest impact on the congregation being more vital, healthy and engender growth? What is another change that if made would have an impact on the congregation being more vital, healthy and engender growth?

- *Better inform the community of who we are.*

More outreach to the community to demonstrate the impact of a liberal religion on the daily lives of people in the community. Hold a series of forums on topical issues, bringing in experts or well-known advocates to inform the community on issues central to what it is to be a UU. Better signage and more provocative postings to entice the public to take a look at us.

• *Better inform the congregants as to our gifts and our needs and how one can serve the other*
Identify and perhaps fund a coordinator's position to match needs with skills within the congregation. In that way, parents can get some insight on parenting skills, congregants with elderly parent responsibilities can learn from those who have already handled that responsibility, etc. Make better use of the weekly on-line newsletter to inform the congregation on the activities of each of the committees working for the betterment of the parish.

3. What might you do to significantly improve outreach and membership retention and how likely is it that the congregation will actively engage in such changes if made?

- *Become a more vital part of the community*

Our e-newsletter system (although a fairly simple and less expensive means of communication when compared to the former printed copies and bulk mail system) is an easy vehicle for sharing information but not as personal or effective as it should be. We plan to focus on a strategic method of communication with all members & friends so information about the life of the congregation, both general and specific, is delivered to interested congregants in the manner they desire. We wish for everyone to feel a connection with each other which can only be accomplished when we communicate well. We will begin with an assessment of each person's strengths and needs and, once accumulated, focus on keeping the information relevant & updated. By sharing our ability to offer something to someone in need we hope to grow closer and growing closer will allow us to open up further to a wider community. This process will require an initial task force and, if funds can be directed, a volunteer coordinator (although a "volunteer" volunteer coordinator will be recruited if compensation funds are unavailable).

- *Do more PR and utilize our web site and social media*

At the same time, we also plan to resurrect a PR committee to communicate to our community who we are, what we are doing and that we wish for their participation. Along with a concerted effort to utilize social media we feel print is still a vital means of outreach to our region.

Most of our congregants enjoy, take pride in and find satisfaction in working together and, if we can implement the above plans successfully, we have no doubt our members & friends and future members & friends will actively engage in such changes; even be grateful these steps have been taken.

4. If the congregation were to receive \$4000 to engage a consultant(s) or participate in outside training, what would be the heart or focus of the consultant's work or to what kind of training would the leadership be sent?

- *Fund (along with internal matching funds) Leadership Training*

We feel we are attending to the health of our current membership, and are doing small things right in our attempts to welcome new members. However, the efforts by leadership at expanding our membership and our programming require coordination and inspiration within the congregation. Outreach to the wider community also takes well-thought design and delivery, in order to influence and engage our neighbors. These areas need strong and focused leadership from the lay members, in conjunction with our minister.

- *Fund (along with internal matching funds) an off-site Leadership Retreat with a professional facilitator*

Leadership training and guidance in how best to communicate on varying levels internally and with the outside community would help push us forward. We see this taking the form of an off-site Leadership Retreat with a professional facilitator. A curriculum could include the use of social media and the web, as well as train-the-trainer modules and other sustainability elements.

5. Given the fact there is leadership and membership turnover, how would the current leadership plan to implement and pass on whatever recommendations or learnings are obtained from the consultancy or training?

- *Train leadership to train others*

One of the most interesting aspects of this process has been the acknowledgment of our need to approach the right people who have the necessary time to commit to moving ahead. Along with the revitalization of current job descriptions and creation of a policy manual we plan to set aside a specific week each year to review these documents. Our next bylaw review will see to it that the policy manual review becomes a part of our annual business so that progress made is lasting or necessary changes to policy are implemented in a timely manner.

- *Create a succession plan*

The Leadership Ministry will be asked to do more than nominate people for board positions but will look at its current structure and create a plan of succession that has current leaders mentoring future leaders. We also plan to seek out members with leadership potential and budget for their attending leadership training events and GA.

6. Please identify other considerations you would like to bring to the attention of the selection committee.

We are a resilient congregation that has weathered our share of problems over the years. The character and commitment of the members of First Congregational Parish has enabled us to not only survive but thrive during good times and bad. We have a solid base of committed individuals and families but could do so much more with more members. We have struggled with trying to devise a plan to increase membership while, at the same time, nurture the current members that we have. It is a difficult task that can be made easier with some help to focus us in the right direction.

7. Why should this congregation be selected as one of five to participate in the program?

- *We seek help identifying where it is possible to go from here and how to get there*

Over the past five years this congregation has been infused with a new energy committing itself to upgrading many aspects of our church life. Our R.E. and Music programs are outstanding. Energy conservation includes installation of new windows, new furnaces and solar modules. We have revised and clarified our bylaws and become a truly Welcoming Congregation. We are at a point where we are doing what we know how to do and need guidance as to how to identify and take the next steps.