

Narrative Description

(1) The Unitarian Society of New Haven (USNH) joined the CONECT network- an IAF network of 29 diverse congregations with approximately 16,000 members in February 12, 2018 for a trial year. We would like to continue membership through the 2018-19 congregational year to strengthen the congregation's commitment to membership and the financial dedication it will entail.

Prior to this trial year USNH considered joining CONECT for a number of years, in order to strengthen our social justice efforts within the congregation and within the larger community. CONECT provides an opportunity for our congregation to partner with a diverse community including people of color and immigrants, other faith traditions, and urban as well as suburban congregations, a desire that congregants strongly expressed following their reading of Rev. William Barber II's *The Third Reconstruction*.

The congregation has a strong, longstanding commitment to Social Justice reflected in our many social justice task forces. Of the seven task forces that focus on advocacy, CONECT is currently addressing the concerns of five of those task forces. CONECT organizers have reached out to our task forces leaders to explore their concerns through one to one discussion. The task force leaders have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to strengthen our voices and have a more significant impact on the community than they could otherwise have.

In sum we would like to continue our membership in CONECT through the congregational year, so that it is seen as an integral part of our Social Justice Ministry and supported by the congregational budget.

(2) Prior to this year, many of USNH's congregants wanted to join CONECT for a number of years, attending its meetings as observers. Because many of CONECT's initiatives overlap with the concerns of USNH Social Justice groups, USNH members have participated in numerous demonstrations and petition signings for several years.

Since September of 2017 the congregation, through the efforts of our 10-member Core Team, has been heavily involved with CONECT. From September to January, the congregation was

involved in a period of discernment about joining. During this time Core Team members were trained to do one-to-one meetings with congregants. Sixty were performed. During this time Core Team members also attended the November CONECT Delegate Assembly.

Following the almost unanimous congregational vote in January 2018 to join for a trial year, Core Team members attended the February Delegate Assembly and joined CONECT. The Core team was trained to do House Meetings and conducted nine of them with 70 congregants attending. The team attended a CONECT leadership meeting, committing to bring 20 members to a June Delegate Assembly to hear gubernatorial candidates. Ultimately 40 committed to go and 33 actually were able to attend.

Currently we are preparing for the October Assembly where we hope to have a 50-person representation. We are also strengthening our bonds with other member congregations through visits and collaborations.

(3) Approximately 150 congregants participate in social justice activities of the congregation. About 75 congregants are involved with CONECT. The Core Team is comprised of 10 members. Others who are involved are members of Social Justice Task Forces whose initiatives are covered by the work of CONECT as well as members who have expressed their concerns at House Meetings and feel that CONECT has provided a forum for their issues to be heard. We are reaching out to the YRUU youth since preventing gun violence is a concern of theirs and a chief initiative of CONECT.

(4) We are engaged in an ongoing evaluation process. We measure participation in one-to-ones, House Meetings, and attendance at informational forums. We also use attendance at Delegate Assemblies as a measure of congregational interest. The larger-than-expected turnout in June was very encouraging.

We also assess the value of our participation in CONECT based on the degree to which the initiatives match with our task forces concerns. Currently the overlap is approximately 70%.

We will use attendance at the September 2018 congregational forum, attendance at the October 2018 Delegates Assembly, responses to a congregational survey (November 2018) and the

congregation's vote (January 2019) to extend the trial year as measures of whether our CONECT membership meets the needs of this congregation.

(5) The Minister, Social Justice Council, and Core Team are responsible for the relationship between the congregation and the network. The Core Team is comprised of 10 members who represent the Social Justice Council as a whole and represent various task forces. As outlined in the CONECT brochure, conveying information back and forth between the congregation and network is a primary function of the Core Team. One of the Core team members is on the Strategic Planning Team of CONECT. Further, the minister participates in an ongoing conversation with the primary organizer of CONECT and attends CONECT clergy gatherings. Finally, CONECT has an additional organizer who is reaching out to our task forces to strengthen our relationship with the network.

(6) There is a line item in the 2018-19 budget for CONECT to allow us to continue this trial membership for the remainder of the congregational year. Also, a portion of the Social Justice Ministry budget has been set aside for CONECT. If the congregation votes to continue membership, following years will be funded by a line item in the budget and a portion of the Social Justice Ministry funds. In sum, we feel that this grant will help us continue our membership in CONECT this year allowing the congregation an opportunity to fully assess the value of membership. We believe the congregation will then vote to continue full membership because it meets many of the needs of our congregants and gives Unitarian Universalist values a greater voice in our community.