

Application for a Grant From the Mass Bay District

Woburn Trust Fund

Submitted By:

The First Universalist Society of Wakefield



January 31, 2002

**First Universalist Society of Wakefield**

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**Introduction:**

The First Universalist Society of Wakefield respectfully submits the following request to the Woburn Trust Fund. Our goal is to increase our membership and friends by at least 15% by the end of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003. In particular, we plan to:

- 1) Continue current advertising and expand our advertising efforts to include newspaper ads in communities not currently serviced by a UU church.
- 2) Offering expanded Adult and Youth RE program and community forums designed to reach out to people who are searching for a spiritual community for themselves and their children and to provide stronger support for current and potential members.
- 3) Obtain the services of higher-visibility guest speakers to run worship services on the days that our part-time minister is unavailable.
- 4) Further strengthen our visibility as a center for cultural and educational events in our community by upgrading our social hall:
  - Adding interior storm windows to save money on heat in the Winter months.
  - Add railings to the wheelchair ramp to make access to the hall ADA compliant.

Financial details of our request:

- Advertising                 \$1000
  - RE and Forums             \$1000
  - Guest Speakers            \$1000
  - Social Hall:
    - Storm Windows     \$1200
    - Rails for  
Wheelchair Ramp   \$1000
- Total:                         \$5200**

Details of our request are in the attached application. If you have any questions about this proposal, please call Wendy Dennis (Acting President) at 781-246-9751.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Purpose:**

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield is applying for funding to be used to enhance our activities, programs, and physical facilities in order to continue to attract new members and friends in Wakefield and surrounding communities not currently served by a UU church.

**Our Vision:**

We believe that there are many people in Wakefield and surrounding communities who are Unitarian Universalists at heart – they just don't know it. We want to let them know that there is a church for them in Wakefield. We must enhance our efforts to get the word out about who we are, where we are, and what we do.

The UU message is not easy for those whose only exposure has been to traditional religions. It's not something that fits on a bumper sticker. Yet we believe that many of the unchurched will recognize their own beliefs in the UU message. We plan to use current resources, including a renewed and vibrant energy in the current congregation, combined with a grant from the Woburn Trust Fund, to become more visible in the communities we serve.

**Background:**

We are now into our third year with our minister, Edmund Robinson. Edmund has brought new enthusiasm and programs to the church. Average attendance at Sunday services has roughly doubled in the last year. He has not only initiated programs himself, but inspired others to bring new activities and fresh ideas.

Among these programs and activities are:

Community Seminars on Islam	Monthly sermon talk-backs
Three Small Group Ministry groups	Annual Winter Solstice
May Day Celebration	Contra Dancing
Circle Suppers	Christmastime Charitable Fund-Raisers
Women's Retreat	Vigorous youth and adult RE programs

Our beautiful church building is increasingly being recognized as a fitting venue for weddings, memorial services, and other activities that are enhanced by its traditional New England setting.

Our successes have become a double-edged sword, however. Because the building is being used more often than in the past, and attracting larger numbers of people, our heating and maintenance costs are rising, as is the need for accessibility.

With the help of individual gifts and labor from our members and friends, we have been able to do some of the needed maintenance of our building, although, as always, the cost of its upkeep is challenging. We are looking forward to the time when growth provides the resources we need to fully maintain and enhance the building. However, at this time, we believe that an investment in some improvements will greatly strengthen our ability to attract and retain new members.

## **Our Strategy:**

Our goal is to continue to attract and retain new members while ensuring that current members also benefit from the efforts we make to reach out to the community and make our church a welcoming place for all. Here is our strategy:

### ***Advertising: \$1000***

We always take advantage of free publicity such as coverage of events by our local papers and Wakefield's cable access organization. And, our volunteer Webmaster has further increased online exposure.

We seek funding to place advertisements in local and nonprofit publications and to continue mailing our "Welcome to your New Home" brochure to new residents of the Wakefield and surrounding communities. We plan to target Stoneham, a community not currently served by a UU church, with a weekly ad in their community newspaper.

We also plan to create and have a good supply of educational brochures for prospective members. These would be placed conspicuously at the church, specifically in the back of the sanctuary and in the Social Hall to attract those who are attending services for the first time and those who may come to the church for community events, such as the Linden Tree Coffee House.

### ***Adult and youth RE and Forums: \$1000***

RE has taken off this past year. We have now added a third Small Group Ministry group. Edmund regularly conducts classes for new members, and current members who want to learn more about Unitarian Universalism and about the Wakefield UU congregation.

In response to the events of September 11, the Wakefield Unitarian Universalist Church sponsored a three-part seminar called Islam 101. In the series, which was open to the community as well as church members, we had several Muslim speakers come to talk about their faith and how it relates to current world events. This series was particularly well-received, and generated a great deal of spirited discussion.

We want to continue offering public forums and ensure that our minister will be compensated for the extra time the forums and group ministry program take. Also, we want to offer additional RE classes or study groups beyond the classes that our minister has been or will be able to offer this fiscal year.

### ***Guest Speakers: \$1000***

We find that lay-led services, enthusiastic and heartfelt as they may be, do not draw as many people as services led by professionals. This is especially important for engaging the interest of those who attend our church for the first time on one of our minister's weekends off.

To this end, we would like to be able to engage the services of higher-profile guest speakers to conduct services on our part-time minister's Sundays off.

### ***Upgrading the Social Hall:***

With contra dances, the Linden Tree Coffee House, a dance studio, and other activities, our Social Hall is becoming a major asset in our drive to attract new members and become financially independent. As already mentioned, however, our success has been a two-edged sword. With more people come higher heating and maintenance costs. Two areas are in particular need of attention:

- ***Storm Windows: \$1200.*** We would like be able to have interior storm windows to replace the makeshift and unattractive windows we are now using. This would save us on heating costs, make the windows easier to put up and take down, and enhance the appearance of the Social Hall.
- ***Rails for Wheelchair Ramp: \$1000.*** Thanks to last year's Woburn Grant, we are building a concrete wheelchair ramp. However, to make the Social Hall completely accessible and meet ADA standards, we need to add railings and a handicapped accessible door to the Social Hall.

This is important not just for wheel chair access, but for the number of church members and event visitors whose knees don't do well on the stairs down to the social hall.

### **Evaluation:**

We will be happy to provide accounts and interim reports as requested.

## Summary:

Our congregation has made serious efforts to ensure that our church continues to reach out to the community, welcome new members, make improvements and necessary repairs, and share the responsibility of keeping our church running smoothly and presenting a welcoming appearance.

An added benefit of our volunteer systems is that they provide newcomers with an easy way to help out and feel more a part of our church family. As evidence that this strategy is working, we have gotten 9 new members since September. Many of our new members, and new friends, have become active in joining, and initiating, church activities.

Among the things they have been doing is:

- Producing children's shows
- Teaching church school
- Helping coordinate the women's retreat
- Writing the Woburn Grant proposal
- Singing in the choir
- Initiating the Circle Suppers
- Serving on the Board of Management
- Facilitating Small Group Ministries

We have also have plans for a more effective pledge drive and feel, overall, that we have made a lot of progress in our efforts to build membership and increase pledges. We hope that you will continue to invest in our growth so that we can also fulfill your mission of increasing the growth of the Mass Bay District congregations.

## **Attachments**

FY2001 Annual report

Current Budget Report

Copy of brochure sent to new residents of Wakefield and surrounding towns

Our February, 2002, church calendar

...and copies of our news letter, *The Gleam*, and various activity flyers.