

OPEN SPIRIT: A PLACE OF HOPE, HEALTH & HARMONY

Open Spirit's Mission and Vision

During 2017, Open Spirit's Steering Committee engaged in a process to develop new mission and vision statements. It was challenging to define Open Spirit in a single sentence, because so much of what we do is about the intersection of diverse communities and diverse programming. After much conversation and reflection, we found words that convey who we are:

Mission: At Open Spirit, we come together with open hearts to:

- Celebrate and deepen understanding of our diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds;
- Enable healing of body, mind, spirit and earth;
- Inspire courage to transform our lives and our world.

Vision: To be a source of hope and healing in a divided world.

Living our Mission and Vision: Three Stories

These three stories offer vivid examples of how we seek to live our mission and vision:

100 Days of Loving-Kindness:

At the beginning of 2017, in the wake of our contentious presidential election, we sought to offer constructive ways to respond to the discord, distress, and cynicism that dominated our public discourse. Beginning on January 20, we launched our "100 Days of Loving-Kindness" campaign. Each day, we sent out a brief reflection on Loving-kindness, through email, Facebook, Twitter, and our website. The reflections were written by members of the Open Spirit community, including people who identify as Muslim, Buddhist, Baptist, Jewish, United Church of Christ, and Ecumenical Catholic. Photographs by local artists complemented the words.

At the beginning and end of the 100 days, we held Shabbat dinners for people of all backgrounds, with reflections on Loving-kindness from Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders. We offered an evening bi-weekly Buddhist Living-Kindness meditation and a multi-faith scripture study, with discussion of Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist sacred texts. Our weekly Gentle Yoga class drew upon the daily reflections as centering for each session.

Throughout the 100 days, we focused on Loving-kindness as a way of claiming our power to transform the public discourse in a small but significant way.

From Veterans Yoga to Food for the Hungry:

In the fall of 2016, Eric began attending our free weekly Veterans Yoga class. After one of our classes, Eric commented that he had just been certified as a master gardener. We showed him the three gardens on campus, all of them created through partnerships with other organizations: our Veterans Healing Garden, our Edible Forest Garden (a permaculture demonstration garden), and our emerging Framingham Community Farm, which would soon be growing produce for A Place to Turn Food Pantry.

From our conversation, a new partnership emerged. Eric recruited the Framingham State University men's and women's rugby teams, whom he coaches, to build raised beds for the Framingham Community Farm. The raised beds enable people with limited mobility to participate as volunteers in producing food for people who are hungry.

This new partnership highlights the ways different communities intersect at Open Spirit to make a positive impact in our world.

From Loss to Beauty:

In the summer of 2016, Florence Sachs, a beloved member of the Open Spirit community and beloved friend of Edwards Church, was diagnosed with cancer. Unable to find a synagogue that was right for her, Florence had

found a spiritual home at Open Spirit, celebrating Jewish holidays here, participating in multi-faith scripture studies and special events like Weekend of Spirit and our annual Iftar. When Florence went into hospice, she received care from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergy associated with Open Spirit. After her death, her Memorial Service was held at Open Spirit. Her family requested that memorial gifts be made to Open Spirit.

The memorial donations, together with a grant from the Framingham Cultural Council, enabled us to bring a long-held dream to fruition. Working with Samela Aguirre, a young local artist, we created a design for a welcome mosaic at the entrance to the main Open Spirit building. Members of our Advisory Committee, along with other Open Spirit participants, selected expressions of their respective spiritual traditions as the border for the welcome sign. A mosaic artist, Cheryl Cohen, oversaw the work of eight volunteers who met weekly to smash tiles and create the mosaic. The volunteers include regular Open Spirit participants as well as friends of Florence from her public library work.

Over 80 people attended the Welcome Mosaic Dedication, which included music and blessings from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Baha'i traditions.

Open Spirit's Challenge for the coming years

Our challenge in the coming years is to develop a staffing model, a volunteer infrastructure, and a financial base that will enable Open Spirit to live into its potential.

Staffing Model

In 2017, we hired Dara Berry as our director of operations for 20 hours per week. She worked with the Steering Committee to develop our mission and vision statements, to create a new website, to organize and strengthen our programming. Our church administrative assistant, Nicola Seaholm, also works 10 hours per week for Open Spirit, coordinating programming and calendars, doing publicity, keeping financial records, and responding to requests and special needs.

Both staff members have more work than there is time to complete. In order to grow, we will need to increase staffing in the future.

Volunteer Infrastructure

Open Spirit has a dedicated, faithful and creative Steering Committee that meets monthly; each of the six members devotes many hours to the organization. There is a fourteen-member Advisory Committee that meets periodically, and includes representatives from many faith traditions.

In 2017, we created a Development Committee, whose goal is to address the challenge of on-going financial stability. We also began the process of creating a Multi-Faith Collaborative, which will work to enhance our multi-faith programming. We are forming a Gardening Team to help maintain and develop the gardens. We are also exploring the potential for an Open Spirit Arts Workshop, a new project which would create public art projects and art classes.

Financial Base

Open Spirit relies on three primary sources of income: grants, donations, and program income. We receive grants from a number of community organizations, most of them directed toward particular projects. Since our inception in 2011, we have received grants from the Carpenter Foundation for the general operating budget; for 2017 and 2018 those grants were significantly reduced. We are grateful to the Seeds of Grace Mission Fund which has offered two generous grants (for 2017 and 2018), since Open Spirit's mission is strongly in alignment with the Seeds of Grace priorities.

The Development Committee is working to find new sources of grant income, to increase donations through our Annual Fund, and to increase income from our programs while still keeping them available to people of all income levels, and to envision new ways to raise income.

Open Spirit's Gratitude

Open Spirit is grateful to the people of Edwards Church for your vision in starting this multi-faith center, for your flexibility and creativity, for your open minds and open hearts.

In gratitude,

Rev. Dr. Debbie Clark, Multi-Faith Coordinator,

For the Open Spirit Steering Committee:

Rabbi Katy Allen, Helen Berman, Dara Berry, Sandy Hewitt, Rosanne Kates, Bette Norton