

Eliot Chapel

## MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

White Paper, January 17, 2016

By Vision2020 Core Team

Our Mission: *Bound by courageous love,  
growing in spirit and inspiring compassionate action.*

Our Vision: *Creating a just world through vibrant, beloved community.*

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This paper describes the Eliot Chapel Vision2020 process, executed between May and November 2015, which resulted in a revised Mission Statement and new Vision Statement, adopted by the Board of Trustees on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Using the three core values identified through a Values Discovery process completed earlier in 2015, the Vision2020 Core Team (appointed by the Board) engaged about eighty members of the congregation, plus survey inputs, to discern a vision of Eliot Chapel. About a dozen congregants served as facilitators of this process, including several youths. This paper outlines the process, as well as interprets the results.

### A. Adopted Mission and Vision Statements

Mission Statement: Bound by courageous love, growing in spirit and inspiring compassionate action.

Vision Statement: Creating a just world through vibrant, beloved community

### B. Vision2020 Process

The phases of the process were: Definition, Execution, Data Classification, Discernment and Validation

1. Defining the Process: Laura Park, from Unity Consulting, brought a visioning process that she had used at other UU churches and which she recommended. The Board and Vision2020 Core Team experienced this process during the August Board Retreat. First, the group developed a powerful question that the Mission and Vision statements were to answer: "What is Life calling Eliot Chapel to be?" Then the group split into teams to perform three rounds: telling a story of Eliot in which a core value was manifest; brainstorming wishes for Eliot 5-10 years ahead; and creating a magazine cover announcing a significant accomplishment of Eliot Chapel in future. From this multiple hour process, the Vision2020 Core Team distilled a 60 to 75-minute version for using in linkage meetings with the congregation. (See Appendix A for an outline of the process, input forms and facilitator script.)
2. Executing the Process: Facilitators were trained by having them experience the process. These facilitators then hosted sixteen meetings between Sep 27 and Nov 6, including two sessions of youths. Input forms were completed for each group that met, each form capturing the results from each of the three rounds (story strengths, wishes, and magazine covers). In addition, Board witnesses completed a form to reflect their impressions. Each line item from each input form was transcribed into a spreadsheet. In addition to these 340 items, 180 answers to two future-oriented questions on the 2014-15 Congregational Survey were inserted into the spreadsheet.

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3. Data Classification: The text of 380 or so data inputs (wishes, magazine covers, and survey answers) was reviewed by the Vision2020 Core Team looking for themes into which the data could be summarized. Keywords were mined from the inputs, and were either added to existing theme definitions or caused missing themes to be defined. In the end, twelve themes were gleaned from the inputs. (Themes, definitions, keywords, and frequency of occurrence are shown in Appendix B.) Analysis of the data revealed:
  - a. Most mentioned were the themes of *Our Community*, followed by *Greater Community*; least mentioned were *UU Evangelism*, *Education* and *Nature*, leaving about 20 unique inputs as unclassified.
  - b. “Third place” themes included *Diversity*, *Leadership*, *Intergenerational* and *Spiritual Growth*, in decreasing order of frequency.
  - c. Eliot Chapel’s response to the Michael Brown shooting in Aug 2014, and subsequent witnessing to Black Lives Matter, prompted the Core Team to wonder if the congregation’s vision of Eliot had shifted between the Spring 2015 survey and the Fall 2015 linkage events. It was also desired to determine if the *Greater Community* or *Diversity* themes should be split into two or more themes. (The results of this sub-theme analysis is shown in Appendix C.) Although keywords related to “race” appeared more frequently in the Fall than in the Spring in both themes, “race” did not predominate over “all or not specified” in either theme. “Race” roughly tied with “religion” in the *Diversity* theme, and “racial justice” roughly tied with “economic justice” in the *Greater Community* theme. It was decided to leave these two themes defined as is.
4. Mission Statement Discernment: The Vision2020 Core Team, joined by the Board President, met a number of times during October and November 2015, as well as sharing exemplary and draft mission and vision statements electronically throughout the Fall. Prior to face-to-face working sessions, the Core Team agreed that an excellent mission statement would:
  - a. Be as bold and grand as the question it answers: “What is Life calling Eliot Chapel to be?”
  - b. Be motivational, aspirational, action or outward oriented, and express a sense of urgency
  - c. Be succinct and memorable
  - d. Be welcoming and inclusive, with sufficient breadth that congregants and visitors can easily imagine ways in which they could engage in or contribute to the mission
  - e. Be consistent with (either implicitly or explicitly) the core values and themes articulated by the congregation through the annual survey and the values and mission/vision linkage meetings
  - f. Distinguish Eliot Chapel from non-religious institutions and from individuals acting alone, while acknowledging that other religious organizations might share the same purpose as Eliot Chapel

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- g. Support End Statements in three domains of congregational life: within individual congregants, among members and friends of Eliot Chapel, and beyond our walls in the wider community

The Core Team culled a short list of six candidate mission statements (Appendix D) that seemed to best meet the criteria. By tweaking the best of these, two candidates were written. In a final working session, aspects of these two were combined to yield the proposed mission statement. (For rationale considered during the emergence of the proposed mission statement from the final two candidates, see Appendix E.) The Core Team unanimously agreed to propose the following Mission Statement to the Board:

Bound by courageous love, growing in spirit and inspiring compassionate action.

5. Mission Statement Validation: The Core Team validated the proposed mission statement in three ways: evaluating the statement against criteria for an excellent mission statement; comparing the new mission statement to the current one; and soliciting feedback from the Lead Minister and Board members.

- a. The proposed mission statement meets the criteria outlined above:

- Criterion: be bold and grand. The phrases or words “courageous love”, “spirit”, and “compassionate action” elevate the language of the mission statement to equal the question being answered.
- Criterion: be motivational, action or outward oriented, and express a sense of urgency. Use of the modifiers “courageous” and “compassionate”, and use of verbs “inspiring” and “bound” connote a mission of movement, embracing and causing change, and requiring strength of character and strong intentions.
- Criterion: be succinct and memorable. The previous mission statement has 17 words; this one has 11. The proposed statement also lends itself to a seven-word slogan form that might be useful in specific contexts (TBD): “Love courageously. Grow in spirit. Act compassionately.”
- Criterion: be welcoming and inclusive. The Core Team believes the proposed statement is the most inclusive of the candidates considered.
- Criteria: be consistent with congregational input (values and themes), and support End Statements in each of the three domains:
  - The most common theme expressed through the survey and linkage meetings was *Our Community*, which includes caring, being valued, and feeling a sense of belonging. This theme is in the among domain, and is represented by the phrase “bound by courageous love”.

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- The second most common theme expressed was *Greater Community*, with its focus on making a difference in the wider world. This theme is in the beyond domain, and is represented by the phrase “inspiring compassionate action”.
  - The most prominent theme in the within domain is “spiritual growth”, with its emphasis on reflection on one’s experiences and making meaning. This theme is represented by the phrase “growing in spirit”.
  - Criterion: distinguish Eliot Chapel as a religious community. The phrase “bound by ...” distinguishes Eliot’s mission from the mission of non-covenantal organizations, such as those serving individual spiritual growth or not-for-profits committed to social justice.
- A comparison of the current mission to the proposed one: Although much has changed in the ten years since the current mission statement was adopted, there is a continuity of identity and purpose between the current and the proposed. A comparison of the elements of each statement shows the similarities and differences:

Current Mission Statement Element	Proposed Mission Statement Element	Discussion
“... a Unitarian Universalist community, gathers to ... “	“Bound by courageous love, ...”	In both cases, this element identifies who we are as a Unitarian religious community. However, the proposed language makes explicit the covenantal aspects of our being in community, i.e. “bound by” rather than “gathers to”. Our identity as a liberal religious organization is expressed in our name.
“... foster free religious thought, ...”	[not represented]	This theme did not appear with any significant frequency in the congregational input, so is not represented as an explicit element in the proposed statement.
“... nurture spiritual growth ...”	“growing in spirit ...”	Same purpose represented in both statements.
“and act for social justice.”	“and inspiring compassionate action.”	The Core Team believes that the purpose expressed in the current statement is represented in the proposed one, with the advantage that compassionate action is inclusive of other kinds of actions than social justice. (For example, a compassionate action would be providing housing to or assisting in the local settlement of refugees, which would not be best described as social justice.) It was also agreed that any perceived lack of commitment to social justice in this change could be addressed in the Vision Statement.

- Board and Lead Minister feedback: Feedback included concerns about the vague syntax of the proposed statement, the absence of an explicit social justice purpose, and preference for a more directive slogan form. During the same period, the Core Team had developed a Vision Statement which they believed addressed the concern about social justice (see below). Since during a month of open commentary period, no principle objections were raised, the Mission Statement was adopted as proposed.

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6. Vision Statement Discernment and Validation: Since no additional congregational input was required, the Core Team immediately began work on a proposed Vision Statement. The Core Team lead offered an understanding of Vision Statement, and its relationship to the Ends, as follows:

- The purpose of the Vision Statement is primarily to recruit new members and energize members to a future state (“recruit to the vision”). It will inform the Ends but is not measurable like the Ends.

The Core Team lead also proposed a process for developing the Vision Statement: to develop short vision statements for each of the three phrases of the Mission Statement, imagining what each phrase might mean in five years. An electronic document was initiated and shared with the Team. Complete vision statements were also welcomed. By the first working session, the document contained statements as shown in Appendix F.

As in the Mission Statement process, the Core Team defined a set of criteria for an excellent vision statement:

- Charismatic, Visionary, Inspirational.
- Aligned to and consistent with the Mission, Values, and Ends, but does not duplicate the Mission or Ends
- Aspirational (slightly out of reach) but practical or doable given our resources, limitations and strengths.
- Consistent with congregational input.
- Not measurable.
- Uses words that are easily understood.
- Looks outward and is more specific and less interpretive than the Mission

Next, the Core Team listed the most important characteristics desired in our future church, as communicated by the congregation through the Vision2020 process as well as witnessed by Board Members:

- We want to make a difference
- We want to matter
- We want to be more diverse
- We want to be inclusive
- We want vibrancy, to be exciting, to have energy
- We want to retain our congregants and youth
- We want engagement and commitment

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- We want a sense of agency as an organization

As the last step, the Core Team decided to start with the draft full statement

We envision a beloved community within and beyond Eliot Chapel, in which all are inspired toward meaning through individual growth and engagement, through bonds that celebrate our differences, and through alliances with the marginalized to realize a just world

This was successively transformed into the proposed statement through an interactive and collaborative session, during which the following points were noted and actions taken:

- that the phrase “beloved community” had both an outward social justice meaning, as found in references to Martin Luther King speeches, as well as being a desired description of our church community, but that we could drop the explicit references to within and beyond from the proposed statement
- that as a more outward focused statement, phrases about individual growth and celebrating our differences could be dropped (but addressed in specific Ends)
- that the phrase “just world” was in fact what we are trying to build
- that the statement should start with an active verb expressing our organizational agency, rather than “we envision”; through several revisions, the verb phrase morphed from “we build” to “leading toward building” to “creating”
- that the adjective “vibrant” should be added to capture the energy and excitement of being part of Eliot community articulated by congregants during the Vision2020 process

The meeting ended with the unanimous agreement of the Core Team to propose this Vision Statement to the Board:

Creating a just world through vibrant, beloved community

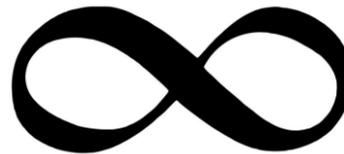
The proposed Vision Statement was brought before the Board in its December 2015 meeting, received no principled objections, and was adopted during its January 2016 meeting.

### C. Core Team Interpretations of the Mission and Vision Statement

Since both statements are a distillation of many months of thought, consideration, effort and discernment by the Core Team, this section expresses some of our individual reflections about these statements, their wording and form. Especially true of the Mission Statement, which is evocative and ambiguous in its grammar and terminology, we don't believe that any Core Team member has a list of sentences that exhaust all possible meanings of the Mission. Therefore, what follows are partial and provisional thoughts, offered in the hope that these will be of value to others. However, we believe that only by living into the new Mission and Vision statements will congregants at Eliot Chapel discover and/or invent who we are, and what Life is calling us to do. May we hold our identity, reason for being, and vision ever before us.

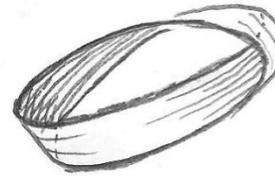
1. Reflections (shared with the Board in an email on 12/9/2015 except as noted)
  - a. The phrases “growing in spirit” and “inspiring compassionate action”, while state in that order, represent a mutual or co-creative relationship in both directions. Some congregants find that they grow in spirit by engaging in compassionate action, while others find that they are more able to engage in compassionate action as they grow in spirit. Both “paths” are supported by the mission. Some people at the linkage events expressed their desire to experience personal growth relating the within to the beyond domains. [Following bullet points and images were added to this document]
    - Both “paths” (from the within to the beyond, and from the beyond to the within) would need to be supported by appropriate means.
    - The Core Team enjoyed playing with images of this co-creative or mutual interaction between the within and the

beyond. One playful image is the infinity symbol



and a Mobius Strip wristband was

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Möbius Strip

mocked up with the two slogans on each side:

the steeple mimics these shapes (see cover page for image, credit to Grace Mennerick).

It was also noted that the finial on top of

- b. The primacy of the first phrase “bound by ...” is significant. While two paths may be supported by Eliot Chapel (a path of compassionate action and a path of spiritual growth), neither can exist, nor mutually interact, without being in a religious community, representing the domain of the among.
- c. The phrase “bound by courageous love” might suggest any of the following meanings:
- Eliot is a covenantal community, in which members are expected to make promises to one another, and to the spirit of our common life (James Luther Adams called this last our “covenant with Being”).
  - The binding of members of Eliot Chapel is like the children’s story of “the bundle of sticks”:  
<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session16/story1> A single stick is easily broken, while a bundle is very difficult to break (representing strength through unity). A bundle of sticks is also more resilient than a single stick of the same strength.
  - The word “religion” comes from the same root word as ligament, a form of connecting or binding the parts of our limbs together.
  - The word “yoke” (*yoga* in Sanskrit) refers to sharing a load through a link or bond.
  - In some marriage ceremonies, a stole or cloth is wrapped about the couple’s hands, to symbolize the binding of marriage. The officiant says “What God has joined together, let no person put asunder.”
- d. What might “courageous love” be? As was pointed out by the Board, the phrase distinguishes one kind of love from kinds that do not require courage, easier love. There were several stories during linkage meetings by people who were reached out to by relative strangers among the congregation, demonstrating our core values of connection and compassion. Connecting to and caring for “strangers” among us or beyond us, those other than or unlike ourselves (whether different in

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ages or philosophies or gender identities or ethnicities), that kind of love requires some measure of courage. We're reminded of Rabbi Jesus' story of the Samaritan, a foreigner, who helps the Israelite, a stranger. A community practicing courageous love would be welcoming, inclusive, caring, generous and giving, especially to strangers, the marginalized, and the otherwise de-valued. Caring for Room-at-the-Inn guests seems like courageous love to us. We engage in courageous love when we foster free religious thought among congregants with different faith perspectives or world views, or when we offer freedom of the pulpit to clergy.

2. Regarding concerns about the specificity and lack of direction in the Mission and vision statements, it should be remembered that the Ends statements that will flow from the present work should be more specific and directive. The Ends statements are the highest level policies to which organizational representatives are held accountable.
3. The work of the Core Team and Board will largely be moot without congregational buy-in and ownership of Values, Mission, Vision, Ends. We hope the Board and lead minister will consider opportunities to gain congregational acceptance, and to frame the day-to-day efforts of Eliot in the context of these shared statements of purpose.

### **D. Lessons Learned for Next Time**

The next time the mission, vision and values are refreshed, the Core Team would recommend:

- Emphasize to proponents of programs the importance of participating in the linkage events; without their voice, church goals (Ends statements) may not support the continuation of their program.
- It worked well that 4/5ths of the Values Core Team was also the Vision2020 Core Team; discerning the congregation's wishes is not only, or even solely, represented by the data that is collected. Church memory relies on more than just data.
- Encourage more participation by the Board as Core Team members and witnesses, since they must make the final decisions about adopting these statements.
- The Board President's understanding of, and involvement in, the process is critical to a successful outcome, in which the congregation's voice is reflected in the results.
- It might be possible and even desirable to combine values, mission, vision data collection and discernment given the similarity of the exercises used to collect the data.

Vision2020 Core Team: Cindy Lau (Lead), Louise Bradshaw, Brian Krippner, Ted Lau, Steve Mennerick, Jordi Prats (Board President)

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**Appendix A: Linkage Meeting Process Outline, Script and Input Forms**

A crib sheet of the activities during meetings with 4-8 congregants, as well as nominal timings, is as follows:

Activity	Start Time	Duration
Check-In: one word – feeling about session?	0	4min
Intro to Session (Board process – timeline, light chalice, three rounds)	4	4min
Round 1: Story telling a. Tell in pairs, note strengths, switch; b. share strengths and record on flip chart – Input Form	8	12min
Round 2: Wishes a. Brain-storm wishes (around circle for 5min), record on flip chart b. Select / circle top 3-4 to take forward: boldest, captivating, energizing, and capture on Input Form	20	7min
Round 3: Magazine Cover a. Determine magazine readership (geography, affinity, ...) b. Create headlines from strengths, wishes that announce achieving the vision after 5-10 years; sketch in photos / images c. Present magazine cover (even if only 1 group), record Input Form	~30	15-20min
Wrap up, check-out (one word)	~50	7min

The facilitator script, an Interview Guide for each participant, and input forms are defined in this document:



Mission Script  
v4.docx

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**Appendix B: Definition of Themes**

The following is the list of themes teased from the congregational inputs, and the frequency with which each occurred:

Theme	Definition	Keywords	Totals
Our Community	Our religious community, our faith tradition and identity; the "among" domain.	Friend/friendship, UU identity, know one another, transformation, haven, understanding, congregation, intimacy, personal / private interactions, UU Principles, chalice	79
Caring	Focus on caring for each other, especially "pastoring" but not only during medical or other major life events.	Pastoral care, PCA, care, healing love, community of care, family	15
Spiritual growth	Maturing our faith; the "within" domain.	religiously connected, spiritual practices, discipline, spiritual experience, safety, retreat, maturity, moral life, Sunday services, covenant group, music	27
Facilities	Our buildings and physical facilities for community activities (whether inner, among or beyond).	nursing center, retreat center, quiet & open sanctuary, community center, BBC building, worship space	20
Nature	The natural world and our stewardship of it.	world, non-human, Bergfried, earth	15
Intergenerational	Activities with focus on young and old, youth inclusion, age diversity.	GATE, rite of passage, mentoring, welcoming kids, cross generations, kids, teens, youth, Youth Sunday, young adults	30
Greater Community	Outreach to the St. Louis area; the "beyond" domain.	Michael Brown, SJ team, Nursery School, outreach, beacon, racial/racism, anger, appreciation, Mother-to-Mother, social action, police, RATI, the poor, community service, economic justice,	70
Leadership	Leading and governing programs, the Board, lead minister, etc.	BoT, involvement, governance, vulnerability, listening, bold goals, joyful leadership, events, commitment, engagement, courageous conflict, minister, collaboration, cluster, list of churches, pledging	39
Education	The church as a learning, training center.	Classes, training, teaching, religious education, adult RE	13
Diversity	Welcoming of diverse people, whether racial, sexual orientation, theology or religious background, ...	diverse, white privilege, welcoming, interfaith, tolerance, engagement, inclusion, black people	47
Membership growth	Growth of our community	Growth	17
UU Evangelism	Promote free / liberal religion	Denomination, benefit from UU, recruit	10
			382

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**Appendix C: Sub-Theme Analysis**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Survey	Linkage	Total	%
Diversity	All or None Specified	12	14	26	54.2%
	Racial	7	6	13	27.1%
	Religion	2	6	8	16.7%
	Both race & religion	1		1	2.1%
				48	
Greater Community	All or None Specified	28	22	50	72.5%
	Race & econ justice	2		2	2.9%
	Racial Justice	1	8	9	13.0%
	Economic Justice		5	5	7.2%
	Misc Specific		3	3	4.3%

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**Appendix D: Short List of Mission Statements**

1. We welcome all seekers of meaning. You will be inspired to live a life of deep connection and of compassionate, courageous action.

Variation: Inspiring lives of deep connection and compassionate action.

2. At Eliot Chapel we companion you on your lifelong journey of faith and doubt, and we act with you to heal the world.

3. Bound by love, you will grow in spirit and serve the world.

Variation: Bound together by love, to grow in spirit and to serve the world.

4. Inspiring individuals to love each other and the world deeply, to connect with the transcendent and each other, to act compassionately and feel a sense of belonging.

5. By transforming the world, we transform ourselves. By transforming ourselves, we transform the world.

Variation: Transforming the world by transforming ourselves. Transforming ourselves by transforming the world.

6. On your path, you come for healing and growth, you stay for courageous community, you act to transform the world toward loving justice.

## Appendix E. Emergence of the Proposed Mission Statement

The following is offered to assist the reader in understanding how the proposed mission statement came to be. It should be clear that neither of the top two statements was wholly rejected; rather, the final proposed statement is a combination of the best language from each.

1. Statement 1: “We welcome all seekers of meaning. You will be inspired to live a life of deep connection and of compassionate, courageous action.”

Discussion: Proponents of this statement highlighted its immediacy / urgency (through the words “inspiring” and “courageous”), its use of the Eliot Core Values, its support for the themes and of the three domains. However, it was concluded that the phrase “seekers of meaning” may not resonate with some we want to attract, particularly the so-called “nones” (unaffiliated millennials). Use of the pronouns “we” and “you” was also seen as problematic. The use of a comma separated list of two adjectives thwarted syntactic parallelism between the phrases.

2. Statement 2: “Bound by love, we grow in spirit and transform the world.”

Discussion: Proponents of this statement highlighted its representation of the covenantal aspects of our community (“bound by love”), its succinctness, its support of the themes and of the three domains. The phrase “transform the world” was thought to be overly general, and substituting the phrase “serve the world” from a short list candidate was proposed. However, it was agreed that a danger in this formulation is the privileged belief that we know what the world needs.

3. Combined Statement: “Bound by love, you will be inspired to live a courageous life of deep connection and of compassionate action.”

Discussion: Phrases from the Statements #1 and #2 were merged, and the adjective “courageous” moved to eliminate the comma separated list from Statement #1. The phrases “life of deep connection” and “seeker of meaning” were thought to be adequately captured by the phrase “grow in spirit” from a short list statement, and the adjective “courageous” was moved forward to yield the evocative phrase “courageous love”. Tweaking the verb forms and eliminating the pronouns resulted in the mission statement being proposed.

## Appendix F: Starter Vision Statements

### A. Full Statements

We envision a beloved community within and beyond Eliot Chapel, in which all are inspired toward meaning through individual growth and engagement, through bonds that celebrate our differences, and through alliances with the marginalized to realize a just world.

### B. Within Domain: growing in spirit

Those who come for spiritual growth are called into activism; those who come for activism are called into spiritual growth.

Those who bring their children for religious education come to value a pluralistic religious community and stay for their own spiritual growth.

Those who seek growth and meaning for themselves or their children will be sustained by community, where differences are an opportunity for discourse.

Individual intentionality and commitment will enliven Spiritual Growth.

### C. Among Domain: bound by courageous love

By 2020, a majority of members have an increased sense of belonging, value and commitment, and are progressing toward leadership and lay ministry goals for giving of their time, talents and treasure.

We will build an intergenerational community of diverse ideas and generosity of spirit.

We will build a covenanted, vibrant community that is highly adaptive and resilient to change.

### D. Beyond Domain: inspiring compassionate action

We will build alliances with the marginalized to realize a just world.

We will be known for our "Fire of Commitment".