

VISIONING COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS 5/30/10

The visioning process of the church is to help determine what OUR CHURCH will be in the future. As we move forward we will change, but the foundation for that change is the strength, success, and traditions of the past. We are not to be mired in the past and tradition, but to stand on that foundation and see WHAT WE MAY BECOME. The following are our understanding of your hopes for the future of our church, along with some preliminary recommendations.

The number one hope for the future of our congregation, expressed in the many home group discussions this past fall, is to increase the number of young families as a percentage of our faith community. The simplest and yet most difficult means (for us shy evangelists) of addressing this is for all of us to become more actively invitational: asking friends, neighbors, and coworkers to join us for worship or family-oriented fellowship events, or letting parents know about our summer Vacation Bible School. When new families visit the church, it should be a high priority for clergy and staff to follow up on those families, getting to know each family's needs and making them familiar with our programs. The Christian Education Board is already at work to increase opportunities for intergenerational fun and service projects. We recommend continuing meetings with our current young parents to determine what worship and program enhancements they would most appreciate. In a previous meeting of parents and the Visioning Committee, one suggestion was to offer periodic Sunday services with a more contemporary look and feel. Other parents desired greater participation by children, youth, and families in Sunday morning worship. All of these changes are labor-intensive. The addition of the Christian Education Associate to the staff has already increased our ministries with children and families. We recommend that that position be continued to support this most important priority of our congregation.

An alternate avenue to bring families into the church is to redesign our website to make it more interactive and visually dynamic. This generation looks first to the internet for information. We should make our website as friendly and informative as possible.

Challenge #1 Become a younger church

Action steps moving forward:

- **Invite families to visit**
- **Create more dynamic website**
- **Involve families as worship leaders**
- **Increase worship and programming that is more multi-generationally engaging**
- **Focus clergy/staff time of this priority.**

A second hope for our congregation's near and long-term future is for the entire congregation to become more involved in issues of environmental stewardship, and particularly the stewardship of our church building and grounds. Acting out our faith begins at home, both our individual homes and our church home. Our church property is also the most visible reflection to the outside world of our commitment to God's intention that we be good stewards of the earth. Responsible stewardship requires research, education, planning, and prioritization. We recommend that the Church Council convene a special congregation-wide ad hoc group, including representatives of the Trustees, the Christian Education Board, the Caring for Creation

group, and other interested parties to create resources for individual congregation members and both long and short-term plans for the “greening” of our church building and grounds. Also, the Caring for Creation group has been functioning relatively “untethered” within our church structure. It needs to find an organizational home to be more effective in its work.

Challenge #2 Become a creation-oriented church

Action steps moving forward:

- **Create a congregation-wide plan for environmental stewardship**
- **Find a structural home for Caring for Creation**

A third finding of our congregational listening project is that, for many, it is small group experiences that church members find most rewarding and even transformative. The church needs to increase its number and widen its range of opportunities for members to meet others in ways that allow us to know each other (and know God) better. One particular subset of small group activities mentioned over and over again was the transformative effect of hands-on mission work, and the desire that the church offer more and more varied opportunities for service learning and reflection. Perhaps the Diaconate fellowship committee could be expanded or some other structure created, and both member and staff time be prioritized to create and maintain a variety of small group activities within the church.

By far, the most concrete guidance given to us concerning smaller group opportunities had to do with hands-on mission work. When we work together for the benefit of others, it creates a special bond among participants and gives us new insight into our faith. Because this opportunity is so important, and because creating a variety of mission opportunities from half-day to week-long experiences appropriate for children, families, youth, or mixed groups of youth and adults is a significant ministry on its own, the committee recommends that we create a new Board of Mission Opportunity to oversee this large, multi-faceted task. We further believe that staff and clergy support will be essential to the success of this new venture.

Challenge #3 Become a church with more opportunities to work, study, serve, and play/

Action steps moving forward:

- **Canvass the congregation to determine what kinds of small-group opportunities are desired.**
- **Give small-group ministries an appropriate institutional home and increased staff support.**
- **Create a board of Mission Opportunity for hands-on mission work.**

We recognize a faith imperative to be always looking at the demographic makeup of our congregation to identify ways to make the face of our church more like the face of God. In the UCC, we preach the gospel of extravagant welcome to all who would join us. Therefore, we must continually ask ourselves what barriers exist within our congregation that would make certain groups of persons feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in our midst. We consciously seek to become more racially, culturally, and economically inclusive, and to remove the last barriers to access for differently-abled persons. Beyond making the church welcoming, we should seek out ways to work side-by-side in the community with those who are different from ourselves: e.g. sharing a week of hosting the cold-weather shelter with a Hispanic church, or working at the

food bank with an African-American student group. We must not expect all to want to come to us, but be prepared ourselves to move outward from the church to create relationships with our diverse ecumenical and interfaith neighbors.

Challenge # 4 Become a more inclusive church

Action steps moving forward:

- **Educate ourselves on issues of diversity.**
- **Remove perceived barriers to diversity in our church.**
- **Partner in mission with diverse faith groups.**

A final word: It is the nature of the church as an institution to try to fit new priorities and activities into old structures. Sometimes this works; sometimes it does not. As the Visioning Committee has been talking about what we heard as congregational priorities, we have encountered structural problems such as the placement of the Caring for Creation committee within the church, the lack of a “home” for hands-on mission planning, the need for a group whose commitment is the creation and maintenance of small groups (extremely labor intensive at first), and, finally, the need for a group to oversee whatever priorities the church adopts out of this report. If we really want to change direction or intensify our focus in particular areas, those priorities need to be supported by our governance structure and by the allocation of clergy and other staff time, as well as by the whole church.

We have an extraordinarily committed congregation. The volunteer hours given to the church to carry out its work are our most valuable resource. We already have many boards and committees and often struggle to fill all those positions in the church. The committee recommends that the Church Council appoint a Phase II Visioning committee to check in with the congregation to see if what we heard is what you want, and then oversee the implementation of the parts of this report with which the church wants to move forward. Part of that committee’s job would be to engage a small group to look at our governance as a whole and ask the questions of whether our current structure adequately supports our current mission and whether our structure is designed to make the best use of precious congregational volunteer hours. The committee would also work with Pastoral Relations and Personnel to study how clergy/staff time is managed and prioritized.

Challenge # 5 Become a church whose structure supports its mission

Action steps moving forward:

- **Appoint an implementation committee for congregational priorities.**
- **Streamline and focus our governance.**
- **Align clergy and staff time to support priorities.**

Thank you to all of you who have participated in the Vision process so far. We look forward to your continued input and support as we move forward.

Faithfully yours,

Michael Henthorne, chair: Kim Thackray; John Erkkila; Betty Massoni; John Hawkins
Liz Oettinger and Ryan Lambert, ex officio