

Long-Range Planning Committee
The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio

Long-Range Plan 2016-2020: The 20/20 Vision

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**Church Council voted November 17, 2015, to recommend
adoption of this long-range plan at the church's
annual meeting in January 2016.**

Long-Range Plan 2016-2020: The 20/20 Vision

“Enter to worship – Depart to serve.” The six words chiseled above our Broad Street doors speak to every generation of First Congregational Church, UCC, and to the world beyond. We proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a warm and genuine welcome to all who would join us on our spiritual journey to “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6:8)

As we adopt this Long-Range Plan, we affirm that we are a thriving congregation of believers who desire to build on our strengths and our church’s identity in the community:

- The experience of God through worship in an historic and beautiful space and through inspiring music, art, liturgy, and preaching;
- The legacy and commitment to justice and mercy;
- A ministry of inclusion, inviting all who seek God to join our spiritual journey.

This plan proclaims a vision to the year 2020 for the congregation’s growth and vitality in pursuing God’s mission through our church’s ministries. It calls us to seize opportunities to increase our membership in a growing region and to enhance our congregation’s distinct position as a vibrant downtown church. It is a vision for the future of First Congregational Church, UCC, expressed through six action words: Worship, Welcome, Connect, Engage, Build, and Communicate.

The 20/20 Vision projects a direction and a framework for setting goals and priorities for the next five years, while leaving ample space and flexibility for the congregation and church leaders to respond and adjust to the future as it is revealed. Implementation of the plan requires Church Council and our commissions, committees, and staff to annually set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) goals related to the six elements of the vision, align programs and resources with those goals, and identify indicators or measurements of success. Our congregation is on a positive trajectory, but to maintain this momentum and to advance our goals, we must make important decisions over the next five years on investments in growth in active membership, in our facilities, and in our staff. Those decisions will be made based on our discernment of God’s mission for our congregation, but the decisions must be informed by measurements of success.

WORSHIP: Experience God in ways that reveal God's love and God's teachings through Jesus Christ and that inspire all who share in the experience to express this faith in their daily lives. Central to our congregation's identity and appeal is **WORSHIP** in an historic cathedral building and excellence in music, liturgical art, and preaching. "No matter who you are or where you are on your faith journey, you are welcome here."

Objectives:

- a. Evaluate and develop extensions of our worship services.
- b. Expand the role of music in the lives of all members, friends, and neighbors.
- c. Develop opportunities for spiritual formation to strengthen each member's personal experience of God.
- d. Seek opportunities to deepen our denominational and interfaith relationships.

Suggested strategies:

- Provide a variety of worship experiences;
- Build the music program with the addition of an assistant minister of music, programs, and space;
- Provide educational opportunities centered around the understanding of worship;
- Increase use of lay leaders and youth in worship leadership;
- Stream worship services on the Web;
- Find communications solutions to limit announcements in the Sunday worship services;
- Encourage participation in the programs of the Spirituality Network.

WELCOME: Extend a warm and genuine **WELCOME** to all interested in our spiritual journey and promote diversity and access to all services and ministries of First Church.

Objectives:

- a. Make the building more accessible to persons with disabilities.
- b. Make more effective use of communication technology to conduct outreach and to follow up with visitors and potential members.
- c. Promote our congregation's identity and core values in ways that attract and invite visitors and potential members and enhance our diverse community of faith.
- d. Actively engage in services and ministries to be a "neighborhood church" for downtown Columbus.

Suggested strategies:

- Employ the significant liturgical art of First Church as a means of welcome and outreach;
- Improve physical access and navigation throughout the building, including updated and improved signage;
- Provide educational opportunities to acquaint members and the community with our church's identity, core values, ministries, and service opportunities.
- Produce a "welcome packet" or brochure to acquaint first-time visitors with our church's identity, core values, ministries, and service opportunities;
- Enhance the church website to allow it to identify and invite virtual visitors to connect electronically;
- Be the center of social justice in Central Ohio and beyond;
- Visibly address race relations in the 21st century and racial reconciliation today;
- Explore the creative use of art and music to share our stories with other communities and to find common ground with them;
- Analyze demographic data for the downtown and the Columbus region to determine where First Church is most likely to attract new members.

CONNECT: Improve congregational care and relationships within the church so that young and old members alike regularly **CONNECT** with one another.

Objectives:

- a. Share the love of Jesus Christ in all aspects of First Church.
- b. Recruit and nurture younger members.
- c. Retain and care for existing members in their commitment to First Church.
- d. Care for all members, including older members who may be homebound or in nursing homes.
- e. Emphasize small group ministries.
- f. Offer education programs and experiential learning opportunities for all ages that deepen our faith, explain and celebrate our religious traditions, and prepare us for mission and ministry.

Suggested strategies:

- Mentor new members;
- Provide opportunities for exploration of current issues that appeal to a variety of interests and a diversity of neighborhoods;
- Employ a minister of care to coordinate clergy and lay persons in providing home and hospital visits, grief and crisis assistance, and other forms of congregational care;
- Support a ministry of small groups based on life-stage, geography, or interests;
- Encourage cooperation and joint programming among the commissions, and particularly with the Education Commission, to achieve common goals.

ENGAGE: Empower our members to **ENGAGE** the people of our neighborhood, city, region, and the world and, through the compassion of Jesus Christ, to bring justice where injustice exists and to bring relief where there is suffering.

Objectives:

- a. Study social problems to learn the root causes of problems, then take action to bring justice and peace.
- b. Develop opportunities for hands-on service in our community that engages volunteers of all ages.
- c. Partner with other faith groups and civic organizations in benevolent work.
- d. Link the church to real world issues and close-to-home missions.
- e. Strategically limit the number of justice and mercy projects and programs so members' time and resources can be more focused and effective.

Suggested strategies:

- Generate opportunities for open discussion and debate on local and world issues;
- Develop focus groups and program series to study social problems and discern appropriate actions;
- Enlist more volunteers in successful missions that are key to First Church's identity; for examples, Good Samaritan Fund, Gladden Community House, Faith Mission, and B.R.E.A.D.

BUILD: **BUILD** staffing, facilities, programming, and stewardship to respond to God’s call and to support our congregation’s ministries.

Objectives:

- a. Improve the transparency of church governance and decision-making by establishing church-wide goals and identifying indicators of success in reaching the goals.
- b. Prepare for change and risk in growing the membership and stewardship.
- c. Focus on financing our future, as well as our present.
- d. Increase staff in order to prepare for growth.
- e. Invest in the beauty of our building as a “ministry of space” and a vital religious and cultural asset for the wider community and future generations.

Suggested strategies:

- Consistently monitor trends in membership, worship attendance, giving, and other measures of the health of the congregation to serve God well and to support effective decision-making and transparency;
- Adopt a three-fold approach in all commission work to educate, develop a plan of action, and implement;
- Conduct “Church Finance 101” and similar educational offerings;
- Utilize new technologies for giving;
- Create a stewardship commission and develop a year-round presence for stewardship;
- Consider an external audit or an internal audit or both to encourage best practices in accounting and to streamline procedures and decision-making;
- Solicit new funds for repair and maintenance of the building from foundations, arts and cultural organizations, competitive grants, and gifts to the church’s endowment;
- Seek designation of our church building as a National Historic Landmark.

COMMUNICATE: Evaluate how best to **COMMUNICATE** in multiple ways within a changing digital world and with the diversity of the congregation and the communities being served in order to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to the wider world and to reinforce relationships within and outside the church.

Objectives:

- a. Promote effective communication among the church members.
- b. Improve church governance and help commissions and committees operate efficiently through greater use of communication technology, such as live-streaming, podcasts, Web, social media, and newsletters on-line and direct mail.
- c. Upgrade the congregation's communications equipment.

Suggested strategies:

- Conduct a communications audit to evaluate First Church's current communications methods and systems and to determine future communications needs for reaching church members and the wider community;
- Inform church members and the public about our congregation's work in the community, as well as within the congregation;
- Employ a communications and marketing manager;
- Upgrade in-house computer and telephone systems so that all staff members, council, commissions, and committees can function efficiently;
- Organize face-to-face open houses and other avenues for committees and commissions to describe involvement opportunities;
- Keep an open link with high school and college graduates;
- Consider how best to share our worship services through the new communications technology.