

**Discerning the Goals of our Church
Interim Report of the Strategic Planning Group
November 18, 2007**

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several months, our Congregation, Ministry Groups and Committees, and a small group commissioned by the Council to serve as a Strategic Planning Group have worked at discerning the future steps we should take in developing Tidewater United Church of Christ and our Congregation to serve.

The draft short term goals identified by the Strategic Planning Group, which will be elaborated at the end of this report, are:

- Increase the Visibility of the Church and its Missions
- Reduce our Debt and Improve our Financial Health
- Identify, Institute, and Maintain Program Improvements to Help Us Develop and Grow our Ministry

This is an interim report, intended to provide information to the Congregation so that all may participate, through discussion, prayer, and further discernment, in charting our future together.

BACKGROUND

This process began with the Pastor's Sabbatical taken last Winter, a Congregational profile undertaken by an ad hoc group assisted by our Associate Conference Minister, and continued through the period of exploration and congregational discernment in late Summer. We called upon the background and training of a consultant who provided insight into the feasibility of a capital campaign and helped us better focus on the challenges we face and the dreams we see for our Church. In a number of discussions, our Strategic Planning Group considered both these recent activities and past discernment-type efforts to help identify the specific goals and tasks we believe we need to undertake over the next year.

As in past efforts, we begin with the foundational statements of who TUCC is and why we believe God has called us together.

In our Constitution, the organizational foundation of the Congregation, we find the following:

"The avowed mission of this church shall be to worship God, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the Sacraments; to realize Christian fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal; to render loving service toward human kind; and to strive for righteousness, justice and peace."

Through our discussion, dialogue, and discernment, we reaffirm our Vision Statement:

We are a community of faith seeking to transform the hearts and minds of our community as we serve Jesus Christ. We will be a home of loving fellowship, open and accessible to all; a thriving place of spiritual formation and growth, social justice and community involvement. We will constantly renew as a church by bringing together many persons and families whose journey brings them here, affirming that journey, and growing together as God is still speaking to our lives of faith.

And we raise up for discussion and prayer these words in our Vision:

Transform: Based in scripture (Romans 12:1-2, for example), this word recognizes that the purpose of any spiritual journey is to cause a transformation. Christ calls us to change how we look at ourselves, our community, and our neighbor. That change need not follow any specific path or reach any specific result; but if our journey does not change us, if our Church does not transform the community, than we risk being nothing more than a social club.

Loving Fellowship: We know that any Community of Faith needs to be a place where individuals and families feel secure, safe, and loved. So much of our lives keep us on the move, often too wrapped up in our "busyness" to connect to each other and the God. All too often, we come to believe that our fears, uncertainties, and pain exist to separate us from each other and are burdens we must bear alone. But we also know when we reach out to others in Faith, we find strength and comfort.

Spiritual formation and growth: Growth is essential to life, and our Church and its relationships must help each of us grow – as Christians and as individuals. We have that same responsibility to our neighbors (and all the peoples of the world are our neighbors) to help them grow spiritually, each in his/her own particular path, perhaps, but grow nonetheless.

Social Justice: Occasionally mistakenly identified with a particular political position, justice is a primary responsibility of the Church in the world. We remember, here the charge voiced by the prophet Micah: “The Lord God has told us what good, and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Community Involvement: We are called to be the Church in Hampton Roads. We believe strongly that we are here to serve as a Light to those in our community who feel shut off, shut out, and alone. We are stewards, not just for the Church, but for our community, and we do this by opening our hearts, our church building, and our lives to all facets of the community.

Affirming the journey: We remember that each of us is called to God’s love from a different starting point, along paths that share much, but also which remain unique to each one of us; what is important is that we are all on the journey, that we share the table of fellowship while on the journey, and that we do all we can to help each other in loving kindness along the journey.

We remain a Congregation committed to the Vision we have seen, and we remain filled with Hope that we can fulfill the purposes God has for us. However, we have learned from our Conversation that, in many ways, we have become “stuck in the mud,” and need to break free. Paraphrasing the words of the Psalmist, “We waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to us and heard our cry. He lifted us out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set our feet on a rock and gave us a firm place to stand. He has put a new song in our mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and revere the LORD and put their trust in him” (Psalm 40:1-3).

As a result, the focus of our immediate future efforts must be to develop and instill a renewed sense of confidence, purpose, and excitement to continue the Vision of Tidewater United Church of Christ.

MOVING FORWARD

We know that our efforts and Journey are not complete; we must continue to work at discerning God’s Will for Tidewater United Church of Christ and for each of us as individual members of God’s Family called together here in ministry. We have accomplished much, but this is groundwork; now the real journey of faith begins as we live out what we have said.

Over the next several months Council, the Committees, and each of us as individual members will continue to discuss what our short and long-term goals should be and identify specific tasks and programs that will bring them to fruition.

As the next stage of our journey begins, let us reflect and give glory to God for the work already completed and thanksgiving to each other as we prepare for the work ahead.

The SPG will look to bring a more specific and complete report to the congregation at the annual meeting in February and will continue both to identify and help council refine goals for the coming year, and to build on the victories we will have in the coming months to chart our future. This work will develop the long-term strategic goals for the next 3 to 5 years as we move toward that future.

Strategic Goal for 2008:

We will shift our thinking, attitudes, and behaviors as a Church and as individuals, from a perspective of discomfort, discouragement and of being “stuck in the mud” to a spirit of renewal, renewal of our collective spirit and mission and of our individual spiritual formation and growth

Draft Implementation Strategies for 2008

- **Strategy 1: Take Steps to Increase the Visibility of the Church and its Missions.** Our Church must be more visible. We will do a better job of letting people know we are here and what we stand for. Visibility will help us to grow as a Church, to grow as individuals in faith, and to grow the work God has called us to. Some of the ways we will seek to accomplish this goal could include:
 - a. To improve the physical facility and property, through signs and changes to the outward appearance of our building, to better let passers-by and those who come to our building that we are a Church, a place where God is Still Speaking.
 - b. To enhance our programs, and community involvement efforts, and culture of extravagant welcome so that we can better live out our mission and let the people of Virginia Beach know that TUCC is a voice for justice and involvement
 - c. To build programs within our Church to help individual members and families grow spiritually so that we can, in turn, share our faith with others through service and testimony.
- **Strategy 2: Take Steps to Reduce our Debt and Improve our Financial Health.** While we share great hope for our Church, we also acknowledge our fear and uncertainty. We know we lack many organizational disciplines and financial resources to do what we need to in order to live out our Vision. Some of the specific steps we can take to meet this goal include:
 - a. Continue to build a spirit and culture of Stewardship, disciplines of joyful commitment of our time, talent, and treasures to the work of the Church. We celebrate one step of this in our Consecrating Stewards program and our pledges of operating support. We also celebrate the continued and mutually supportive relationship our Church enjoys with Beach Manor School.
 - b. Conduct a successful Capital Campaign in the Spring of 2008 to raise \$90,000 over the next three years for retirement of debt, improvements to our facility, and enhancements to our programs.
 - c. We must make organizational changes in our financial oversight and planning to better ensure that we are in fact good stewards of the gifts our membership brings us. These include changes to some of the committee structures and training programs for Council.
- **Strategy 3: Identify, Institute, and Maintain Program Improvements to Help Us Develop and Grow our Ministry.** As we implement the other two strategies set forth above, we will identify areas where changes to our organization and structure can better help us provide strength and clarity of purpose. Attention to that aspect of our Vision which calls us to Spiritual Growth and Development reminds us that Renewal in all aspects of our faith journey will strengthen each one of us and, together, we will strengthen TUCC and our Community. We will seek to renew in many ways, among them:
 - a. We will reach out to the many resources within our Congregation, our Conference, and the Wider Church for tools to help us identify and adopt organizational and process changes that, in turn, will help us better communicate to each other, to identify and build leaders for our committees and Council, and be more effective in our “business management” of the Church’s resources.
 - b. We will identify and hold training programs on leadership development, understanding that each of us are called to be leaders in different parts of our lives, but that we need help to understand what that means and to develop the skills to be faithfully effective. Programs on communication, on what the roles and tasks of church officers, on how mission programs can be developed, on augmenting our welcome to newcomers are a few of the specific programs we can explore.
 - c. And we will develop programs that will help each and every one of us; children, youth and adults, to develop our Christian Discipleship. We will learn the history and polity of the UCC. We will seek intentional ways to live out a welcoming spirit, to develop habits of prayer and contemplation, and to learn how God has spoken through scripture and how God continues to speak to us today. We will seek to uncover our gifts and model our faith.