

REPORT FROM THE CORE GROUP
SEPTEMBER 14, 2000
STORRS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Consultants: Hannah Howe and Graham Davidson

THE CHARGE TO THE CORE GROUP: Harold Furr, Chair of the Church Council, moved and it was seconded that: 1. The Church Council establish a committee (core group) to study and evaluate program needs of our church and to make recommendations for pastoral and non-ministerial staffing; and, 2. That the Church Council be directed to hire a team of facilitators recommended by the Conference to work with the Core Group...

The sole purpose of this summary is to encourage group discussion for those who are present and others who are interested. The process of capturing on paper intense and lively discussion is not a perfect one. Individual comments and statements should not be taken out of context. Please ask a core group member for clarification of any specific comment contained in the following document. We, the Core Group, have worked diligently to formulate these goals and visions for the Church's future, based upon your responses to the surveys and interviews. Your trust in us is so greatly appreciated. We have prayerfully considered each vision statement, each goal, in hope they will help us discern the direction God would have us move in our Church's mission in the next five years.

We value all the work each person, each committee, each volunteer, each board, each staff member is doing to keep our Church vital in the community. The areas we see most vital to our growth, both spiritually and physically, are: Worship/Spirituality; Christian Education; Fellowship/Membership; Outreach; Staffing/(Ministerial Relations); Finance. The vision statements and goals have not been entered into lightly. There were two meetings each month, beginning on January 23, 2000 and ending on June 25, with a congregational workshop on June 21. Subsequently, meetings were held on August 23 and September 14. We explored where we have been; where we are now; where we would like to be in the year, 2005.

We first agreed upon a Covenant within which we would work together. We found this to be very helpful and recommend the covenantal process for possible use by other groups. For us, it is a statement of "holy manners," the manners of a faith community. It is an action of faith, far deeper and more significant than manners of politeness. We cannot change people. That is God's work. Our aim is to help one another be faithful, to seek to create a safe environment that offers support and reconciliation. A covenant is the promise that we make to uphold the dignity and health of each one. It is for a community where the well being of each member is important. Between the lines, we can affirm what we know as the Golden Rule: "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." And so our covenant:

We have agreed to abide by the following covenant into which we have entered with one another, under God:

1. We will be honest with each other.
2. We will keep confidential those things necessary to keep confidential.
3. We will trust each other.
4. Every statement, comment is valid from the speaker's point of view.
5. We will be polite with one another.
6. We will share the load equally and participate as fully as we can.
7. We will say something positive about each other's concerns, statements, suggestions, before noting any weakness.
8. We will be willing to listen openly, giving each time to give their ideas.
9. We will recognize the value of each person in the group and leave with love.
10. We will speak in first person: I...
11. We will work to understand good works, traditions, etc., of the faith community.
12. We will at all times recognize our responsibility to the entire congregation to make our views, decisions, and recommendations as a group. It may not be what I think but what we think together, so the congregation can say: "We are proud where we are going as a congregation together. We are a unit. We love our church."
13. We will speak the truth in love.

We took a look at our history. Every congregation is powerfully shaped by its history. We can move confidently onward, knowing the strengths to build on and weaknesses to strengthen. We have tried to reflect this in our goals and in our vision statements. We have learned this is a warm, caring Church. Our congregation is an aging community that needs to reach out to young families, UCONN students, and youth. We know the music program is very dear to us, a tradition that reaches across the ages.

We are very optimistic about our music program, our children, the young leadership among us, and this opportunity to vision the future. We are anxious about the parking facilities, the lack of involvement of students, the lack of participation in our committees, our financial base to care for our facilities and to augment programs for the future, our declining membership. We encourage all members, boards and committees to read the by-laws relative to their responsibilities and expectations. We want to focus intentionally on growth, both in spirituality and membership. We believe these things need our direct attention.

We do believe the following items help keep people invested in our Church: the gospel message, opportunities for Christian growth, intergenerational opportunities, programs for both children and adults, our energetic community outreach, our music program.

We believe our primary goal is the enhancement of the quality of the religious life of our church. Our secondary goal is the business life of the Church; i.e. how much to raise for the budget, how we shall repair the roof.

Here is our call to action. It takes all of us to move to the sound of God's voice, calling us to new beginnings.

I. WORSHIP/SPIRITUALITY

Vision: *Our worship will be uplifting, exciting, engaging, challenging, and nourishing; participatory and enthusiastic: stretching us mentally and spiritually, through scripture, word, music, praise, and prayer.*

Goals:

- Strong, in-depth preaching helping us live the Mission Statement
- Integrated Music program
- Reverence
- Prayer concerns (name only and given prior to service). (Some of those in the Wednesday discussion group were uncomfortable with just the name. Some churches have a lay person read prayer concerns from an entry book that could be signed when parishioners arrive.) Prayers and concerns could be listed in the Carillon.
- Lord's Prayer to be prayed while the children are still in the service. (Possibly at the end of the Front Pew service.)
- Scripture lessons – using both Old and New Testament readings each week. One lesson could be read in unison or responsively. (Page numbers for lessons.)
- Children's message to be tied to the Scripture readings when possible.
- Lay participation in Worship service.
- Good liturgical flow. Some like the same every Sunday. Others like to see change. All want a good flow. Content – would like to see responsive reading sometimes.
- Hymns – a balance of hymns from New Century and Pilgrim hymnals (familiar and new) with some intentional learning of new hymns.
- Announcements in bulletin not made again in worship.
- Variety in choir anthems – using folk and spirituals as well as traditional. Possibility for choir exchanges. Dedicate anthem to shut-in.
- A mix of traditional and contemporary service styles – not necessarily in the same service
- A place or time for personal witness from both children and adults
- Introduction of guests immediately prior to Fellowship Hour.
- Return to traditional Doxology.
- Reinstate the Gloria Patri.

We strongly recommend:

- Bible study groups – responsibility to Christian Education
- Prayer group or prayer chain – responsibility to Women's Fellowship or Deacons
- Confirmation class – responsibility to Ministers, Christian Education and Deacons
- New member education and orientation – responsibility to Church Growth, Ministers and Deacons

II. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Vision: *Our Christian Education will educate and nourish our Christian identity to foster individual spiritual growth so that we can make an impact in our changing world by faithfully and passionately living the teaching and example of Jesus Christ.*

Goals:

- Raise awareness of importance of Christian Education. It's a vital, Christian thing! Raise awareness through the sermon, the Carillon, the Bulletin Board, the Church School Fair, intergenerational testimonials (model the faith on individual basis), intergenerational Vacation Bible School.
- Increase enrollment – double in 5 years
- A place for all ages between 9 and 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, particularly confirmation through college
- Paid part-time Director of Christian Education, working toward full time
- Associate minister --- Family ministry, full time
- Empower lay leadership to work with Director of Religious Education in Youth activities
- Increase funding
- Sponsor youth to do mission activities in wider community each year.
- Increase in volunteerism. Bring in adults to the Christian Education program
- Have a curriculum with Scripture and today's situations
- Have team teaching
- Have a young adult forum.
- Have a Kids' Church
- Have more Bible Study, perhaps an interfaith Bible study
- Year-long confirmation class with deacon involvement
- Have new member preparation: encourage responsibility to faith, church, and service, forming small groups through which relationships in the church are created. Convey that it is rewarding to serve in the church.

III. FELLOWSHIP/MEMBERSHIP

Vision: *We will be an inviting Church that inspires people to make church attendance and participation a #1 priority, thereby developing continuing intergenerational relationships in and through the life of the Church.*

Goals:

- Increase total membership by 50% over five-year period.
- Create a position of membership coordinator to help implement By-laws, Article IX, Section 11.
- Follow up on "lost" members.
- New member preparation class
- Increase member involvement in the functioning of the church

- More fun activities
- Closer ties among the congregation – e.g. fellowship activities; members adopting new members; neighborhood activities based on social activities

IV. OUTREACH/MISSIONS

Vision: *And Jesus said... “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39) We will catalyze the Church’s efforts to meet the material and spiritual needs of people in the surrounding community and the world in the context of Christian values and beliefs.*

Goals:

- Maintain outreach growth proportionately with growth of church membership.
- Revitalize the ministry to UCONN students by reactivating the Special Committee on Student Ministry, as outlined in By-laws, Article IX, Section 8.b and Article X, Section 3.
- Find ways to encourage youth to take part in mission activities, including activities in foreign countries.
- Increase activities in the name of the church to enhance our visibility to the general public with hopes of fostering church growth and the performing of mission activities by non-church members.
- Promote awareness of other groups’ outreach activities, e.g. Women’s Fellowship, Quilters, etc.

Other suggestions:

- Hold a Saturday worship at 5:00 p.m. in addition to Sunday service.
- Bring the ministry to the students where they are rather than waiting for them to come.
- Have a lemonade stand during UCONN events.
- Have an all-student choir.
- Sponsor “The Steeplejack Experience.”
- Advertise study space, chapel availability and food kitchen help in the student newspaper and on the bulletin boards on campus.
- List addresses for families in the death notices in the Carillon to facilitate expressions of sympathy.

Va. STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Full-time Senior Minister
- Full-time Associate Minister
- One-half- or three-quarter-time Director of Music Ministry
- Part-time Director of Religious Education
- Full-time Secretary/Office Administrator
- Full-time Sexton (with cleaning and maintenance responsibilities)

While we realize it may often be necessary to be opportunistic and flexible in filling any of the staff positions, we strongly recommend a part-time Director of Religious Education during the search for an Associate Minister. We strongly recommend the Associate Minister have strong Family Ministry responsibilities. We strongly recommend the Director of Religious Education be responsible for all the Christian Education of the Church, working cooperatively with the existing paid and volunteer staff.

It is of great importance that we maintain the beauty and strength of our present music program. It is agreed that we want a minister who relates to all people, a minister who is personable, a minister who carries through the worship ritual with dignity. We recognize that the minister is not totally responsible for our spirituality, but should be the nurturer of personal spiritual growth. We want a Christian education leader who is top notch with children, one who can equip lay leaders, coordinate groups to service the church and see that it happens.

We recommend:

- That we aim to fully finance the above staff to carry out the goals as set.
- That we have intergenerational nurturing of spirituality, i.e. small groups for Bible study, fellowship, etc.
- That we keep the strong music program in place.
- That we reactivate the by-laws as they relate to the ministry to the UCONN students.
- That the laity be delegated to tasks that can be done with overseeing by the ministers.

Vb. MINISTERIAL RELATIONS:

To help the flow of communication, it was felt changes should be made in the way this committee functions. The structure appears to be hazy. Should this committee be doing both salary evaluation and liaison between the minister and the congregation? We recommend that salary recommendations be removed from this committee and given to the Personnel Committee. This recommendation is in no way intended to criticize the way in which past or present members of the Ministerial Relations Committee have performed their duties under the Committee's present charge, but simply to suggest a structure that can facilitate the Committee's principal function of liaison.

Goals:

- Change By-laws, Article 10, Section 2, separating the function of evaluation and salary from this committee. (Change By-laws, Article 8, Section 3.b to conform to this change.)
- Promote the liaison role of this committee to the congregation and minister.

VI. FINANCE:

Vision: *Our vision for finances in this church is to have the budget meet the needs of the Church for program development with an outstanding professional staff while maintaining and improving our physical plant.*

Goals:

A. Expenditures

1. Sufficient salaries and benefits to attract quality personnel.
2. Expanded funding for programs
 - a. Greater number of participants
 - b. Enriched programs
 - c. Wider program scope
3. Maintenance: develop scheduled maintenance to keep the physical plant in good condition
4. Capital improvements
 - a. Expanded parking
 - b. Improved handicap access

B. Annual Income

1. Increase Stewardship income by:
 - a. An outstanding program
 - b. Increased attendance and membership
2. Increase endowment income by increasing size of endowment
3. Organize money-raising programs

C. Long-term income: build the endowment and memorial gift accounts through:

1. Better education
2. Annual drives

D. Solutions/Resources/Responsibility for improving finances:

1. Set fund raisers (Finance board)
2. List of maintenance items matched with people (Properties board)
3. Contact among parishioners throughout the year (Fellowship board)
4. Parsonage ownership? (Finance, Ministerial Relations, Council)
5. How can we use the Knowlton property. (Entire Church)
6. Publicity
 - a. Carillon articles (all boards & committees)
 - b. Sunday bulletin (all boards & committees)
 - c. Campus bulletin boards (outreach)
 - d. Endowment brochures (Finance board)
7. Increase involvement and visibility of diaconate (Deacons)
8. Increased endowment and planned giving (Finance Board)
9. Review and modify stewardship campaign (Finance Board)

This is our recommendation to you. No one can do this alone. Boards and committees supported by the staff in accordance with our by-laws are encouraged to invite others in the wider church community to become involved in ways to use their gifts and talents, and learn new ones. It takes all of us to be the Church.

The Core Group

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