



MARCH 2017

**A VISION:
THE
TRANSFORMATIVE
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
IN TEN YEARS**

**A REPORT OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
FROM THE STRATEGIC VISIONING TASK FORCE (2015-2016)
AND THE VISION IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE
OF THE UCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2016-2017)**

Jesus tells us a parable of laborers in a vineyard. Some folks are called to work early, some midday, and some late. Despite the variance of time in the field, the worth of each worker is the same. A task force has been asked, and we have said yes, to entering the conversation regarding the vision of the future of our church. While some have been working in this field for decades, and some have just entered the conversation; we **all** are engaged in co-creating the vision of the kin-dom of God. All of us—the entirety of the United Church of Christ—are in the vineyard currently. And we seek to follow the call of Christ and imitate Jesus in this world as best we are able, aware that there are still many to enter the vineyard.

While this research and vision has focused on and been pulled together by young adults, our faith tells us that the vision of God is one where each individual is valued, loved, and celebrated. Our bylaws affirm that it is the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith our own—in reality of worship, in this honesty of thought and expression and in the purity of heart before God. With that held in intention, the first iteration of this report elevated a younger voice within the Church with intention to paint a picture in conversation with what we already know based on experience, research, and history. In awareness that the UCC is a diverse body of people across many experiences, we re-released the survey to gain more information in early 2017.

This report calls for a United and Uniting Church for the sake of the gospel. If we are going to take seriously the message of Christ that we are bringing about the kin-dom of God in the here and now, then we must do the work of self-actualization to BE THE CHURCH, to be the salt and light of the world. (Matt 5:13-16)

The Strategic Vision Task Force and the Vision Implementation Task Force carried voices of people from all over the United Church of Christ. We held an awareness that we were pulled together with attentiveness to diversity of geographic region, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation and ability; and we covenanted to show up as best as we were able, with authentic vulnerability for where we were together, as well as where we fell short. Where we fell short in demographic representation, we reached out with intention to invite as many voices as we could in two rounds of data-gathering.

Methodology: In order to gather the data and feedback necessary for creating a vision, we first gathered, analyzed, and interpreted information through the following methods: a) An in-depth survey of individuals under 40, both within and beyond the UCC, which garnered over 2,800 responses; b) individual interviews and focus groups conducted by selected Conference coordinators, totaling 115 responses; and c) an extensive reading list of various books, articles, research reports, and other materials relevant to the task of responding to the question before us. Overall, hundreds of hours were spent in meetings, editing survey questions, preparing training materials and working with Conference Coordinators, analyzing qualitative responses by grouping comments into themes, and prayerfully discussing and discerning the many challenges and opportunities facing the church.

Transparency is a critical component of sound and accessible assessment. As the first group constructed the survey, and brainstormed the demographic of interest, their hopes were to gather a data set that was not only indicative of the church we are... but the one we are hoping to be. The reality is that though the first round was able to gather a significant number of participants,

they still missed critical voices along the way. With a commitment to inclusion, the Vision Implementation Task Force sent a second round of the survey out in early 2017, open to all. For the second survey, responses were collected from October 3rd, 2016 to December 16th, 2016 via online survey. They worked to get the invitation out to more participants via the social media streams of the task force, as well as the United Church of Christ as a whole, by repetitive sharing on the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the UCC. In total, we received 423 responses with a completion rate of 74%. Between the surveys, interviews, and people who helped distribute and enter into the research, over 4,000 people were engaged.

The second survey affirmed the results of the first, and both teams are confident to affirm and present the following 10 year vision for the United Church of Christ.

VISION:

CHRIST-DRIVEN CONNECTION

Striving to imitate the life of Christ, the transformative United Church of Christ will encourage authentic connection and compassion between individuals, local communities, and the world using creative, agile technologies and partnerships.

GOD-CENTERED ACTION

In ten years, the United Church of Christ will be committed to building deep partnerships in community that produce collective social action. We will boldly and actively endeavor to bring justice for all. We will be invitational as well as self-reflective, engaging the internal work of welcoming radical difference and truth-telling against systems of oppression that have held God's beloved people captive.

SPIRIT-LED LEADERSHIP

In ten years, the transformative United Church of Christ will be an innovative, nimble, and credible source of institutional support, moving with Spirit and intention, able to vision courageously and respond swiftly to/for the communities and world in which we live for the sake of the gospel.

March, 2016: Recommendations of the Board of Directors to Actualize the Vision

- ▶ It was motioned and approved that the United Church of Christ Board of Directors receive the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force, “What Does a Transformative UCC Look Like Ten Years from Now?” and consider report’s recommendation as institutional priority towards realizing the articulated vision.
 - ▶ It was motioned and approved that the United Church of Christ Board of Directors authorize the systems and committees necessary to empower the recommendations in alignment with the UCC mission and purpose.
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VISION IMPLEMENTATION WORK:

Guided by the newly articulated Purpose, Vision and Mission of the denomination, the Board-appointed Vision Implementation Task Force discerned, researched, and expanded the work of the first team. They expanded and affirmed the results of the first survey through re-distribution, and then identified how to move forward into actualizing the vision over the next few years. The Task Force was called to both name what is crucial in this time, as well as that which will need attention in the years to follow, including naming what needed alignment towards the mission moving forward.

According to the Vision Implementation Task Force, the Missional Priorities of the United Church of Christ to focus upon through the work of the vision are:

- ▶ Inclusive Excellence
- ▶ Technology Infrastructure of the UCC
- ▶ Curriculum, Training and Development for a “Just World for All”
- ▶ Innovation Center and Think Tank
- ▶ Strategic Organizational Alignment

Inclusive Excellence

Inclusive Excellence (IE) is the recognition that a community or institution's success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of its constituents. More than a short-term project or single office initiative, this comprehensive approach requires a fundamental transformation of the institution by embedding and practicing IE in every effort, aspect, and level of functioning. The goal is to make IE a habit that is implemented and practiced consistently throughout an organization.

Proposed Focal Points:

- ▶ Realignment of the practices, processes and staffing models of the United Church of Christ to model and affirm our commitment to inclusive excellence.
- ▶ ONA Process, Synod Resolutions, Be The Church Commitment

Technology Infrastructure of the UCC

“Our capacity to effectively communicate our vision, identity, and values of a more peaceful and just world is one of the essential functions of all settings of the Church and, perhaps, what the world needs most at this moment. We must embrace the technological tools of our age—opportunities for creative worship, video conferencing, online learning, community organizing apps, social media messaging, etc.—and use those tools as freely and effectively as most of us use pen and paper”.

Proposed Focal Points:

- ▶ Develop a Technology Assessment report and implement the recommendations aligning the national settings priorities around being technological viable for a global and changing world.
- ▶ Develop strategies that involve the technological infrastructure, accessibility, and an orientation toward an engaged technological future.

Curriculum, Training and Development for a “Just World for All”

“We must see ourselves as uniting as opposed to simply united. A uniting church takes into consideration the changing national demographic in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, sex, and gender identity as well as the social, political, economic and historical realities that our faith communities are situated within. This church is aware that we are existing in a world that is globalized even if our systems and practices have maintained a local viewpoint. A relevant church is and will be at the forefront of these changes in terms of our awareness, knowledge, skills and action.”

Proposed Focal Points:

- ▶ Cultivate resources that will speak to conflict mediation and promote conversation in times of anxiety.
- ▶ Leveraging and assessing all levels of resources in alignment with our Vision, Mission, Purpose.
- ▶ Promote and create curriculum and media resources for relevant church issues of the present and the church becoming.

Innovation Center and Think Tank

The nature of our work can be enhanced through the inclusion of a diverse collection of ideas and perspectives. In successful organizational development there is a constant look at the possibilities that are ahead and the intentional space to glean those ideas.

Proposed Focal Points:

- ▶ Use Synod as a place to brainstorm and dream about innovation and the future of the church.
- ▶ Find ways within every expression of the church to celebrate and disseminate new and innovative, programs, services, ways of being organized and “being church”.

Strategic Organizational Alignment

“All of our visioning points to a dynamic need for a nimble and changing church. This is not a request for a fundamental abandonment of our Christo-centric paradigm, but rather, a reimagining of its structures in awareness of the colonial, patriarchal, and oppressive context in which it was developed.”

Proposed Focal Points:

- ▶ Strategic Alignment of budget, human and programmatic resources with the mission, vision and purpose of the church
- ▶ Streamlining a resource list of partnerships, networks, and collaborations to manage duplicate efforts.
- ▶ Dissolve systems that perpetuate work for a different kind of church, and move towards a high impact model of support

A Compilation of Reports

Presented by the Members of the UCC Strategic Visioning Task Force:

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