

**SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
VISION & TRANSITION COMMITTEE
FY 2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

The Vision & Transition Committee has been meeting since mid-2021 in response to Sean’s invitation that we “work with the Congregation to establish its vision for the future and actions we need to take to get there”. Since that time, the Committee has been actively responding to Sean’s call to action.

Preliminary Reviews

During the first months of the Committee’s work, we spent time reflecting with the Congregation on the Church’s historic place in our community, its past achievements and what has made it special in years’ past. We then spent time reviewing who we now are as a Church and what makes us special in our community today. Following these reflective periods, the members of the Committee spent several months meeting with members of the Congregation, both in on-line and in-person sessions, to discuss our members’ views as to where we are as a Church, what makes us special, and, most importantly, what are their hopes and dreams for the future of our Church and for their lives within the Church. We were fortunate to have over 70 members of the Congregation participate in these discussion sessions.

Preparation of Mission, Vision and Values Statement

Following these reflections and discussion sessions, the Committee reviewed and discussed all of the comments that we received from the members of the Congregation. Using these comments, the Committee prepared a proposed Mission, Vision and Values Statement (the “MVV Statement”) to capture the major recurring themes, issues and ideas that are important to our Congregation.

The Committee circulated the MVV Statement to all members of the Congregation and invited them to review, reflect, respond and comment on our efforts. We also held further discussion sessions to allow members of the Congregation to present their comments, questions and concerns regarding the proposed MVV Statement. After listening to all of the input, the Committee agreed to a modification of the draft MVV Statement to underscore our identity as a “Christian” community.

Happily, at a Congregational meeting at the end of February 2022, the Congregation adopted the proposed MVV Statement with the edits suggested by members of the Congregation. The final MVV Statement reads:

Our Mission:

We are a Christian community seeking to be living examples of radical hope and extravagant love, connecting our community with God and with each other.

Our Vision:

We will create opportunities for spiritual growth, build a welcoming community of diverse relationships, serve our neighbors, and work for a just world.

Our Values:

We value:

- Active involvement in our greater community;
- The need to spark spiritual growth and creativity;
- Being welcoming and open to all people;
- Nurturing each person's faith journey;
- Advancing social justice issues;
- Intergenerational worship and activities; and
- Faithful stewardship of our resources in support of our Mission and Vision.

Future Planning

Once the Congregation adopted the new MVV Statement, the Committee turned to the task of considering recommendations to the Congregation as to the implementation of the MVV Statement. We observed that there is an energy and desire in the Congregation to become more active. The new Racial Justice group is a recent example of how interested members are pursuing new missions. We have also heard a recurring message that our members have a strong desire for opportunities to explore their spiritual growth.

To help determine how the Church might capture this energy and focus it on realizing the goals of our MVV Statement, the Committee asked all Church Boards and Committees to reflect on the MVV Statement and report to the Committee regarding actions they would undertake and the resources and support that they would need to live into the new MVV Statement. We received many exciting and detailed responses from Boards and Committees. These responses helped us to identify key areas where leadership and resources will be required in the future to achieve our goals and objectives.

In coming years, these responses should serve as a focus or guide for the new missions and ministries that the Congregation will undertake.

Challenges Identified

While the Committee was exploring how our Congregation might realize the goals in our new MVV Statement and the leadership that we would need to do so, we also discovered certain other information that is directly relevant to our future plans. Among other things, for many years we have not been growing as a Congregation, Sunday worship attendance has fallen significantly, and Church School enrollment has dropped. In addition, based on information provided by the New Hampshire

Conference, we discovered that our average annual giving per member is significantly below that of other NH churches of similar size.

We also discussed potential funding needs for the new initiatives to be undertaken under our new MVV Statement, and acknowledged the annual problem we have had with adopting a balanced budget. In reviewing our budget information and available literature on Church finances (available upon request), we also discovered that we spend significantly more on personnel expenses than is recommended by budget guidelines applicable to Church communities. While we do not compensate our clergy at a level consistent with New Hampshire Conference Guidelines, and our only full-time staff consist of two clergy and our Office Administrator, we spend over 70% of our annual income on personnel costs, when the recommended benchmarks indicate that such costs should not exceed 50%. Because our annual giving does not equal our personnel costs, we also realized that our earnings from our invested funds and from our investment property at 6 South State Street and other gifts provide all of the funds that are needed to pay our non-personnel expenses.

Jed

Throughout the Committee's work, Jed encouraged us to freely discuss his ongoing health issues and how they may impact the Mission, Vision, and Values process. His recent announcement of his intention to retire as of the end of fiscal year 2024 has provided some clarity with respect to future planning for Church staffing needs, and we thank Jed for that.

Recommendations

The Committee recently met to discuss the recommendations that it wished to make to the Church relative to next steps in the implementation of the MVV Statement and future planning for the Church. Based on all of the input that the Committee received, the Committee offers the following recommendations:

1. The Church should immediately begin a search process for a new Senior Minister to replace Jed when he retires. Since these search processes usually take 18 to 24 months, it is likely that we will not have identified a new Senior Minister until close to the time that Jed will be retiring. This Committee has identified the following list of areas of primary interest to our members under the MVV Statement, and recommends that the Search Committee seek new leadership with strong talents in each of them:

Children and Youth
Worship
Spiritual Growth/Faith Formation
Community Outreach/Involvement
Pastoral Care
Evangelism

Social Justice
Intergenerational Activities
Operations
Advocacy/Social Justice
Stewardship
Building Community
Church Community
Diversity

2. To provide support for Jed and the Congregation in the near term, we recommend that Sean's employment by the Church as Interim Minister be extended to January 2023.
3. Following the end of Sean's time with us, the Committee recommends that the Church enter into a part-time contract with an Interim Bridge Minister to handle specific tasks or projects that the Church identifies as needing particular support.
4. The use of a part-time Interim Bridge Minister will help us to begin to reduce personnel expenses during fiscal year 2023. The Committee also recommends that the Church adopt a goal of reducing our personnel expenses to no more than 50% of our annual income during the following 3 years on a phased-in basis. We leave to the Church Council and future leaders of the Church to determine how these goals will be reached. We also do not envision that these percentage reductions must necessarily come at the expense of existing staff positions. Should annual giving be increased substantially through increased giving by our existing members or growth in membership, the need for reductions would be lessened.
5. Once a new Senior Minister is hired, we expect that he/she/they will work with the Congregation and Church leaders to develop an appropriate staffing model for the Church that is consistent with our financial abilities and the level of Congregation support.

Throughout the Committee's work, we have been deeply blessed by the active participation and involvement of Church leadership and the members of the Congregation. At every step of the process, our goal has been to understand what we are all called to do and to be as God's representatives here on earth. We thank everyone for their support and welcome comments, questions and input regarding our recommendations.

Submitted by

Vision and Transition Committee

Rev. Sean Dunker-Bendigo
Peter Imse

Charles (Chip) Morgan
Rev. Jared Rardin
Jill Smart
Leanne Tigert
Sara Willingham
Pam Young
Janet Zeller