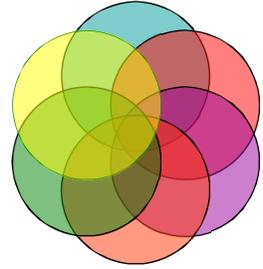


**Urbandale United Church of Christ
Strategic Plan for Six Focus Areas
2015-2018**

UPON WHICH PATH WILL THE SPIRIT REST?



The Urbandale United Church of Christ (UUC) strategic planning team, composed of Diane Dornburg, Randy Jedele, Maryellen Knowles, Diane McClanahan, Mary Minard, Tom Rendon, Sue Renfrow, and Wendy Sontag, began meeting in July, 2014, with the goal of developing a plan for strengthening the church and establishing a future direction for the next two to three years. It was felt that some consistency and clarity was needed to guide the church's ministry over the long term. After much discussion, Diane McClanahan introduced the theory of Appreciative Inquiry and the book *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* by Mark Lau Branson, which discusses how interviews can be used as a way to evoke stories that illuminate an organization's strengths. The team was inspired by the idea of trying to find out who and what Urbandale United Church of Christ is at its best and using those strengths and experiences as a foundation on which to build a plan for the future.

Throughout November, December, and into part of January, the team interviewed approximately 80 UUC children, youth, adults and staff individually and in a few small groups. Jon Duvick, Mary Minard, and Jim Mitchell also helped to conduct interviews. Interviewees were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- *YOUR EXPERIENCES: Remembering your entire experience at our church, what stands out as an experience when you felt alive, motivated, and excited about your involvement? What made it exciting? Who else was involved? What happened? What was your part?*
- *CHURCH VALUES: What do you value most about our church? What activities or ingredients or ways of life are most important? What are the best features of this church?*
- *YOUR DREAMS: Make three wishes for the future of the church. Describe what the church would look like as these wishes come true and where you see yourself fitting into these wishes?*

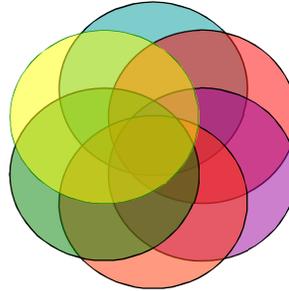
Clear themes emerged from the interviews. People valued the church's *social justice* and mission orientation and its progressive theology. Members recalled meaningful and moving experiences in *worship*. Members emphasized the importance of *education* for their own spiritual growth and that of their families. Members yearned for *financial stability*, so that the church could successfully fulfill its God-given ministry. Many highlighted experiences in *leadership* roles that allowed them to be enriched and engaged. Finally, and most importantly, members expressed

appreciation for the church’s joyful hospitality, repeatedly describing an “exuberantly welcoming” *community* where everyone is celebrated, valued, and accepted.

These themes evolved into six value areas that were seen as interrelated, no one more important than the other. Six interconnected circles in the image on the cover of this document are used to symbolize these six values. The team further developed each area using the language of journeying to describe the experiences, values, hopes, and dreams that had been so eloquently and openly shared during the interview process.

<i>CONTENTS</i>	
Introduction: Upon Which Path Will the Spirit Lead?.....	1
Community.....	3
Education.....	5
Financial Stability.....	7
Leadership.....	9
Social Justice.....	10
Worship.....	13
Suggested Timeline.....	15

VALUE – COMMUNITY



WHAT WE HEARD:

UUC members value being a caring and supportive community to each other within the congregation, as well as reaching out to others in the wider community. Many express overwhelming feelings of belonging and inclusiveness:

- “I felt welcomed, so I came back. It just felt right, intimate... so I was drawn here.”
- “Our congregation is eclectic, yet we’re all valued and accepted.”
- “I feel a connection with like-minded people who have similar values. It gets lonely in the world and this is a community where I can connect at an authentic level.”
- “I feel safe here.”
- “I know I’m loved here.”
- “People were there for me when my dad died.”
- “I like that we know everyone is welcome; no one is left out just because they are different.”
- “When I had cancer, people were there for me—helpful, sincere and genuine.”
- “What this church does best is care and show compassion for others. We do, instead of talk.”
- “This church is ‘beyond welcoming.’”

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

We are a growing church community that offers a personal atmosphere where “everyone is welcome” and people have a sense of belonging. Small group and church-wide events, activities and opportunities engage people of all ages, nurture sacred relationships, and build diverse community in a changing world.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

Create a congregation of many small groups, both old and new, where many interests and challenges are available and there is a focus on the social justice and spiritual needs of the church. Examples:

- Provide spiritual growth opportunities for adults, including spiritual care and spiritual direction.
- Form experiences in alternative locations such as House Church, coffee shops, etc.
- Plan follow-up events for new members that enable them to feel a sense of belonging.
- Create additional opportunities for families with young children.
- Provide social opportunities and short-term, hands-on mission experiences for a variety of ages, interests, and needs.
- Grow a vital youth group that engages our youth in faith forming, social experiences that are exciting and contagious.

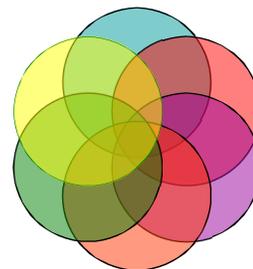
WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE'VE ARRIVED:

When people walk into the church, there is a place for them with a variety of opportunities that are invigorating and exploratory and that use a variety of volunteer leaders.

WHO WILL HELP:

Social Media Team, Small Group Liaison, Caregivers, Pastor, Social Committee, Spiritual Directors within the congregation, parents with young children, the youth and youth leadership, new retirees, new members leadership, and new members.

VALUE – EDUCATION



WHAT WE HEARD:

Education for all ages contributes to the growth of individuals and the mission of the congregation:

- The OWL program is fun to teach, fun to learn, and embodies our principles.
- By letting our youth ask questions, we encourage a maturing of faith.
- We are not afraid to ask hard questions, trying to make sense of the world.
- Educational events were an important part of our journey toward becoming an open and affirming congregation.
- “When I know the words to some hymns, it makes me feel good” (3-6th grade youth).
- Field trips and Vacation Bible School were great experiences (3-6th grade youth).
- Older kids like working with younger kids in EIW or nursery.
- Children remember feeling special when receiving a Bible in third grade.
- They like OWL, confirmation, and Sunday school.
- Lombard training was a highlight with its focus on keys to church health.
- The seminar on homosexuality and the Bible was an excellent learning opportunity.
- Vacation Bible school – working in an organic vegetable garden, pulling weeds, picking vegetables, preparing to give them to families who needed them – was experiential and taught kids how to give back.
- With 15 kids and supportive parents, we created an Emerging Adults Sunday School class, studying the Bible and other religions and discussing current events.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

We are a theologically progressive community that encourages questioning and critical thinking about God, the world, religion, and society. Opportunities for faith formation and education about our congregation’s mission are designed so that everyone can participate in an engaged process of learning and practice which is integrated throughout all aspects of our life together.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

Build on current successful educational programs through long-term intentional curriculum planning, recruitment, and development of additional educational leaders, and ongoing review of the quality of educational programs and satisfaction of participants throughout the age spectrum.

- Create experiences for youth *and* adults that connect education and spirituality, help youth determine “what is their call,” and afford adults the opportunity to explore all beliefs and practices.
- Offer special age-related worship and learning opportunities for middle-elementary and older youth, concurrent with adult worship, that infuse new energy and vitality into the youth program.
- Offer the OWL program to youth and adults within the church community and in the wider general community.
- Develop focused ministries for recently confirmed youth and for young families.
- Plan opportunities for hands-on experiences (kitchen, field trips, making things), especially during other events such as Mardi Gras, Lent, etc.
- Initiate a theological school or lay training institute for people who want to go deeper, perhaps partnering with another UCC church.
- Offer in-person and/or on-line Bible study opportunities such as a weekly Bible study based on the lectionary.

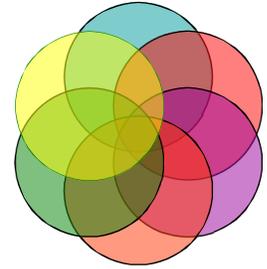
WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED:

Opportunities for faith formation, energetic discussion, and education about the church’s mission are infused throughout the life of the congregation. Skilled, inspiring teachers are available to foster learning and questioning at all age levels.

WHO WILL HELP:

Christian Growth Team, Adult Spiritual Formation Team, youth group leaders, OWL trainers, Pastor and Ministry Program Coordinator.

VALUE – FINANCIAL STABILITY



WHAT WE HEARD:

UUCC members value financial stability in the church, so that the church can fulfill its mission. A more proactive and realistic financial approach is desired in order to be less reactive with cuts and more successful in predicting needed expenses. Members shared experiences of strong personal growth when they were involved in financial/stewardship campaigns for the church:

- “I like everything I’ve done with the church . . . leading “Till Debt Do Us Part” campaign, \$20,000 for the furnace, \$50,000 for debt campaign.”
- “I was the Energizer Bunny for Stewardship – felt involved and energized.”
- “When I was Moderator during Capital fundraising for the Fellowship Hall, it was exhilarating and fun. I surrounded myself with smart people to help.”

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

UUCC has sustainable resources (income sources) that allow the church to adequately meet all its financial obligations based on the priorities grounded in its mission.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

- Develop a long-term financial planning team with the following charges:
 - Analyze historic trends in revenue and expenses, especially their connection to church attendance, membership, and pledge units.
 - Develop a proactive plan responding to the lessons learned from this analysis to introduce new ideas or abandon ones that had no history of success.
 - Establish a capital campaign that articulates precisely what is to be accomplished (debt relief, repairs, endowment).
 - Develop a long-term endowment development plan with annual goals for the first five years and a ten year goal. This could include encouraging more members to become involved with “LIFE SHARE” program.

- Charge the Leadership and Budget Teams with developing a list of priorities for the church that are grounded in its mission, using the insights learned from the strategic planning process and the earlier discernment process. Rather than a budgeting process that is grounded in meeting assumed ongoing expenses (staff salaries, building, OCWM), the budgeting process will be a concrete expression of purpose, mission and ministry. The end result will be a statement of priorities that expresses who we are and the means by which we determine where and on what we must spend our money.
- Create a stewardship education plan that begins with new member classes, ongoing Adult Spiritual Formation or other venues, and special classes on faith-based money management and other related topics which include the use of small groups and one-on-one meetings that leverage the church's perceived value of hospitality and caregiving.
- Redesign stewardship activities to ensure all members are reached, new tactics are used, and new groups are engaged.
- Provide greater awareness of multiple avenues for giving, including on-line and automatic withdrawal options.

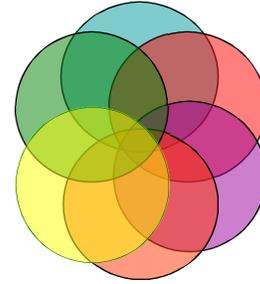
WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED:

Church finances are stabilized to such an extent that the church is able to fulfill its mission and has established a long-term plan for expanding that mission.

WHO WILL HELP:

Pastoral staff, former moderators, Membership Team, Stewardship Team, Education Team for both youth and adults, Endowment Team, Building and Grounds Team.

VALUE -LEADERSHIP



WHAT WE HEARD:

UUCU members appreciate the “ease of involvement” in leadership roles. Many recall “exciting times” of serving in capacities where they could make a positive change or contribute to the spiritual growth of both themselves and the congregation. One member expressed elegantly how her experience leading a small group was “incredibly rich... intimate... and the best of church.” Being asked to participate or take on leadership roles helps members feel “fully connected and supported,” “energized,” “purposeful,” and a “part of the conversation.”

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

Members are energized as they engage in the ministry of the church. Deliberate attention is paid to identifying and using people’s spiritual gifts. There are enough hands raised to say “I can do that!” in order to take the place of someone who needs to step back, so that no one experiences burn-out or feels overburdened.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

- New members are fully engaged because they have mentors to show them how to get involved and how to get projects completed; visitors and new members are quickly invited to participate.
- A “recognizable tenor” is created in the leadership of the church that is consistent from one term to the next. This could mean longer service terms and more carryover for leaders, but also more guidance and involvement of pastoral staff as “the glue” over the long term and across leadership team administrations.
- Lay leadership takes on some responsibilities to make things happen and lighten the senior pastor’s burden.
- Former moderators and retired pastor-members are consulted to solicit their wisdom.

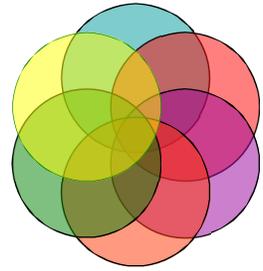
WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED:

New and long-term members alike are fully involved in ministry and express satisfaction in the engagement of their spiritual gifts.

WHO WILL HELP:

Pastoral staff, former moderators, Membership Team, caregivers, small group leaders, Pastor-Congregation Covenant Team (PCCT), Personnel Team.

VALUE – SOCIAL JUSTICE



WHAT WE HEARD:

UCC members consistently express “feeling most alive” when they are living out their faith in the world by participating in experiences such as serving a homeless meal, advocating through AMOS, working at the food pantry, or volunteering for Family Promise. Members appreciate that there is room for exploring and people are accepted where they are on their theological journey: “I wasn’t told what to believe but was asked, ‘what’s your story?’”

Overwhelmingly, members also value that UCC stands for justice, equality and inclusiveness; that LGBT members are not just accepted, but integrated into the fabric of the church community; and that children have the opportunity to grow up with a diverse understanding of family.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

We are a socially progressive church community. Spiritual depth propels us into the world for living out justice and creating God’s realm here on earth. Our congregation is diverse racially, ethnically, and socio-economically.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

- Groups with similar interests or ages meet regularly outside the church walls. These groups are also integrated into other projects, like those below, so that the norm is one of diversity and acceptance.
- There are regular organized local service opportunities that are announced through social media to the wider community:
 - Meals served at homeless shelter
 - Mitchellville prison ministry
 - Youth outreach
 - College outreach
 - Giving Tree
 - Family Promise

- Food Pantry
- Habitat for Humanity
- Rebuilding Together

- Education and spiritual enrichment create a rhythm/balance between the spiritual life and the needs of the world.
 - A Just Faith-type program is available
 - Focused adult education programming encourages both “being/praying” and “acting/doing.”
 - Mission messages are delivered from the pulpit.

- The congregation is actively involved in a major social justice issue that is embraced as a community. Possibilities include:
 - The Green Boat Crew and congregation are actively involved with other local churches – education, projects, political action – to advance a greener environment and commitment to the earth.
 - Active participation in A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS)
 - LBGT advocacy

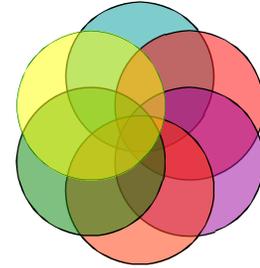
WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED:

We’ll know we’ve arrived when leadership for social justice not only trickles down from ideas presented by the pastor or leadership team, but also arises from within the congregation. Congregation members will be initiating projects and others will be eager to join in. Leadership roles will be shared, so that there is not a sense of burn-out but an influx of new participants.

WHO WILL HELP:

Community Concerns Team, Green Boat Crew, Pastor, Social Media Team, Adult Spiritual Formation planning team.

VALUE - WORSHIP



WHAT WE HEARD:

UUCC members shared multiple stories of dramatic or memorable worship experiences where they felt fully engaged, and voiced appreciation for how values of justice, equality, and inclusiveness were expressed during worship:

- Easter service where a child was offered communion.
- Baptisms where children were embraced and welcomed – “My family could be honest about who we are.”
- A healing and prayer service that “reminded me what it is like to stop . . . and care for somebody through ritual.”
- Moments when music was passionate, forward leading, emotional and heartfelt, or when drama was incorporated into the service.
- Members expressed appreciation for talented musicians, for the aesthetics of worship, and for times when services “gel” and all the hymns, readings, prayers, scripture, and sermon are interconnected.
- One youth indicated appreciation for “when people are welcomed and baptized and we sing to them.”

WHERE WE WANT TO GO:

Our worship experience is engaging, meaningful, creative, innovative and active. Preaching touches both the heart and the head.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE:

- Recruit a new, representative Worship Team that includes music staff, pastoral staff, and six additional individuals.
- Charge the new worship committee with the following:
 - Plan for a monthly worship “innovation” within the regular Sunday worship service (e.g., visual meditation, silent reflection, Psalm recitation,

liturgical drama/dance) that seeks meaningful ways to explore worship themes and words from the lectionary text.

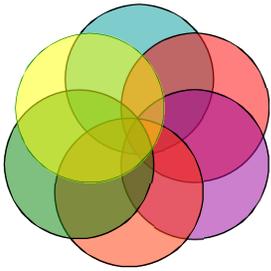
- Design a second worship service that may be offered at a different time and is a vehicle for a different, more creative or alternative worship experience.
 - Design a weekly non-Sunday worship/spiritual gathering (to include singing, prayer, and scripture) during Advent and Lent. May include Taize-style or “Blue Christmas”-type services.
 - Plan for periodic pulpit exchanges or guest preaching (from the congregation or outside) that enhance and inspire our ministries, ie. “Women at the Well, ecumenical environmental efforts.
 - The Worship Team assists in selecting hymns of variety, including social justice themes, folk styles, and non-English idioms and introduces them to the congregation in ways that are meaningful.
- Expand the use of innovative technology in coordination with the Worship Team.

WHEN WE WILL KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED:

We’ll know we have arrived when UUCC offers two different worship services that are both characterized by a variety of innovative, creative, and interactive experiences. Shared leadership is evident and participants are engaged and spiritually connected.

WHO WILL HELP:

Pastoral staff, Music Director, organist, former moderators, Membership Team, Worship Team.



SUGGESTED TIMELINE

(Community, Education, Financial Stability,
Leadership, Social Justice, Worship)

By June 2015:

All Values

The Strategic Plan is presented and approved at Congregation's Annual Meeting.

Education

- Christian Growth team meets to plan for program year 2015-16 with goals of developing more focused ministries and hands-on experiences.
- Christian Growth team explores ways to re-energize middle and high school youth offerings, including the possibility of newly designed Wednesday Night Alive or youth service offered concurrently with worship.
- Plans made to survey kids (by email?) to solicit ideas about their interests.
- Plans for OWL classes are initiated with special attention to promoting the opportunity to the wider community by collaborating with the Social Media Team.

Leadership

- The Personnel Team establishes how lay leadership will continue church ministries during the Senior Pastor's sabbatical in July/August/September, including evaluation of whether leadership training is appropriate.

Worship

- Leadership Team recruits members for expanded Worship Team.

By August 2015:

Education

- New volunteers are recruited to help with curriculum planning and Sunday school music experiences.
- Ministry Program Director recruits Adult Spiritual Formation (ASF) team to examine options for expanded adult education and opportunities to explore spiritual beliefs and practices.

Financial Stability

- Long-Term Financial Planning Team is formed.

Social Justice

- Plans are completed for monthly service opportunity.
- The Community Concerns Team and Social Media Team have formed a plan and are collaborating to announce monthly service opportunities.

By September 2015:

Financial Stability

- The Budget Team begins a prioritization process in preparation for the 2016 budget meetings.
- Redesigned stewardship campaign begins.

Education

- New Wednesday Night Alive or youth-centric program is established.

Leadership

- Preparation begins for the November 5th *“Leadership and Anxiety in the Church”* Lombard Mennonite Peace Training at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center.

By October 2015:

Education

- A middle-school specific Sunday school class is offered with dedicated, trained leaders.

Leadership

- The Leadership and Membership Teams have formed a joint task force to develop a New Member Mentor Program.
- The Pastor Congregation Covenant Team (PCCT) and Personnel Team work with the Pastor post-sabbatical to continue implementation of lay leadership in mutually agreed upon areas of ministry.

Worship

- New Worship Team is meeting monthly to coordinate monthly worship innovation and timeline for implementation of a second service.
- A plan for additional Advent and Lent worship offerings is begun.

By November 2015:

Community

- A Small Groups Ministries Liaison to the Leadership Team will study and revise the intent and function of that ministry and reorganize as needed, including, but not limited to, a "small groups ministry team."
- Current small groups are listed with memberships to gather data to measure growth both in number of groups and number of members.
- Membership on all church teams is listed, as well as other volunteers, in order to gather baseline data.
- A survey is conducted to determine interest in small group leadership for groups to meet expressed interests, such as millennials, parents with young children, retirees, an alternative adult education and spiritual direction.
- Feedback is gathered from the two groups of caregivers as to the current effectiveness and future suggestions of their roles.

Education

- Quarterly service opportunity for youth has been offered.

Social Justice

- One new group is meeting at least part-time outside the church walls.
- The Adult Education team reviews offerings and develops a series for spring 2016 addressing “Faith in Action” or “being versus doing.”
- The Green Boat Crew continues its efforts to educate the church congregation on environmental issues and participates in at least one environmental activity/event occurring in the wider community.

By January 2016:

Community

- The needs of the youth are assessed and a 2016 plan is formulated to address those needs.
- Plans for new small groups, alternative education, and spiritual direction are presented to the Leadership Team.

Leadership

- The Leadership Team begins consulting with the pastoral staff to explore options that would provide consistency in both pastoral and lay leadership over the long term. This may require policy revisions and consultation with the Personnel Team or past moderators.

By May 2016:

Community

- An appreciation activity for current volunteers has occurred.

Social Justice

- Adult Education evaluates its spring offerings and begins planning for additional programs for fall of 2016.

By June 2016:

Community

- A minimum of three small groups is formed and functioning focusing on social justice, spirituality, and/or other expressed interests. At least one group meets in an alternative location outside the church.

- Spiritual direction, spiritual companionship, and/or other forms of spiritual care are offered.
- A plan for retaining and engaging new members is created and presented to the Leadership Team.
- At least two follow-up activities have occurred for each new member class and opportunities for using their gifts and talents are shared.

Education

- Two more quarterly hands-on or service opportunities for youth have been offered.
- Re-evaluation of youth offerings against the goals stated above: Do experiences connect spirituality and education? Are we learning new songs? Did we do field trips? Are the kids engaged and challenged?
- Consideration given to additional training for teachers and youth leaders.

Financial Stability

- The Long-Term Financial Planning Team makes initial recommendations.
- A reinvigorated Stewardship Team is formed to develop an education plan.

Leadership

- The New Member Mentor Program is implemented.
- The Leadership Team makes recommendations for greater consistency in leadership and adherence to the Strategic Plan.

Social Justice

- Congregation members have received messages from the pulpit, from the Green Boat Crew, and from other members encouraging participation in greater community-level advocacy.

Worship

- Worship team makes its recommendations for a second service and timeline for implementation is presented.
- Plans continue for non-weekly worship service during Advent (2016) and Lent (2017).
- Monthly worship innovations are evaluated and plans made for adjustment/continuation.

By August 2016:

Community

- At least one special activity for youth or families with young children has occurred.
- Success stories are gathered by eliciting feedback at the end of meetings or small groups and reported to Small Group Liaison.
- Each quarter a success story of some small group is shared by the liturgist with an invitation to participate in new or ongoing groups.
- One new social function for the congregation has occurred.

By September 2016:

Education

- An alternative adult education (additional options) is formed and is operating.
- ASF team also begins exploring possibilities for lay institute/theological school.
- Additional volunteers recruited to teach both youth and adults.
- Youth service opportunities/hands-on experiences are planned.

By January 2017:

Financial Stability

- The Long-Term Financial Planning Team makes secondary recommendations.
- The new Stewardship Education Plan is implemented.

By June 2017:

All Values

- The success of 2016's outcomes are evaluated and feedback given to the Leadership Team. Adjustments in the outcomes will occur if/as appropriate.

Community

- A minimum of three additional small groups for various ages and interests are formed and functioning.
- An additional special event for youth has occurred.
- Follow up on the 2016 reports from the caregivers, non-attending members and ways to engage new members is accomplished.
- Spiritual direction/companioning is ongoing.
- A core group of volunteer drivers is organized for getting people to church who need rides, or to doctor appointments, etc.

Education

- The success of 2016's outcomes will be evaluated and feedback given to the Leadership Team. Adjustments in the outcomes will occur if/as appropriate.
- Ongoing quarterly service opportunities for youth are offered.
- Evaluation of additional adult education offerings occurs and adjustments made.
- Evaluation of OWL program occurs.

Financial Stability

- Stewardship Team assesses stewardship activities and, using the stewardship education plan, formulates a stewardship campaign with new tactics and engaging members who have not typically participated.
- The Long Term Financial Planning Team reports to the Leadership Team.

Leadership

- The New Member Mentor Program and continued leadership development is re-evaluated and adjustments or recommendations are made.

Social Justice

- A Just Faith-type program is planned for fall.
- Leadership Team re-evaluates UUCC membership and participation in AMOS.
- Community Concerns Team and Social Media Team evaluate the effectiveness of their campaign to increase involvement and participation in service opportunities at all levels.
- One additional group is meeting outside the church building.

Worship

- Plans made by pastor for one pulpit exchange or special ministry message.

By January 2018:

All Values

- A Congregational survey assesses satisfaction with the direction of the church, as well as ideas for additional planning.

Community

- As a result of the congregational survey plans are made for maintaining and enriching the sense of community within the congregation.
- One new social function for the congregation is planned.

By June 2018:

All Values

- New plans are presented to the congregation at the Congregational Meeting.
- Appropriate follow-up occurs.

Education

- Ongoing service learning opportunities offered.

Financial Stability

- Long Term Financial Plan and Stewardship Education Plans are evaluated.
- The Stewardship Team continues its efforts and reassesses effectiveness of its campaigns.

Leadership

- A former moderator or retired pastor cabinet is formed as a leadership support and advisory group.

Worship

- Re-evaluation of pulpit messages for “heart and head” inspiration and additional plans made.