

“Never put a period where
God has placed a comma.”

~ Gracie Allen ~

God is stillspeaking

Listen
DISCERN
ACT

Responding to a Stillspeaking God,
A Discernment Workbook

*To facilitate the journey of
Urbandale United Church of Christ*

Prepared by
The UCC Discernment Team

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Dear Members and Friends of Urbandale United Church of Christ,

We frequently claim our belief in a Stillspeaking God. The UCC has become famous (infamous?) for the Gracie Allen quotation: “Never put a period where God has placed a comma, God is still speaking...” Sometimes God’s commas come as crosses and stones sealing a tomb; but we believe in a God who speaks from beyond the grave and calls us into new life.

The challenge, of course, is to move beyond belief in a Stillspeaking God and into faith. Belief is something we profess, faith is something we do. I think that faith in a Stillspeaking God directs us to do three things: listen, discern, and act with focus and resolve.

It is exactly that journey—listen, discern, act—that we are embarking on this spring. At the request of the Leadership Team, Urbandale UCC is spending the next several months in an intentional period of discernment. A Discernment Team will help to guide us along our way. Their and my hopes for this journey are:

1. To help you come to understand discernment and use it as a process *in your daily life*;
2. To teach you a few concepts (hardiness and polarity theory) that will be useful to you *in your daily life*;
3. To teach you a bit of what the research on congregations tells us are very predictable patterns and challenges that we are experiencing;
4. As a community of discerners, supported by good research, we hope to clearly outline a course of action to enact what God is calling Urbandale United Church of Christ to do *right now* and over the next four to five years.

There are important dates and they are listed on page 4. *Please add them to your calendar, if you have not done so already.*

This workbook comes from a portion of my doctoral studies and with a lot of input from both the Discernment Team and the Leadership Team. It is a *workbook*, which means that it is not an “answerbook.” It is meant to support you as we work through this process together. There are places for you to write your reflections; we hope that you will bring them with you to the meetings. As noted in the “date box,” there are adult education opportunities to facilitate discussion on the concepts and ideas presented here.

I am again reminded of the parting invocation that Pastor John Robinson gave to the Pilgrims as they set out on their journey: God “has yet more light and truth to break forth” from God’s holy word. I invite you to pause now, reflect on those words for our day, and prayerfully prepare to continue our journey as faith-full pilgrims.

In hopes of wholeness,

The Rev. Dr. Shannon Michael Pater
Senior Pastor

The Members of the Discernment Team

Jan Kinney: I grew up in Des Moines. I graduated from Dowling High School and the University of Iowa. And yes, I'm one of those that bleed "black and gold"! Two days after graduating from Iowa, I took a job at KCCI-TV. Only planning on staying a few months, almost 30 years later, I'm still there. I work in the Engineering department as a supervisor and operating technician.

I have four sisters, two living in Des Moines and two out of state. I have several nieces and nephews and even a few great-nieces!

I have two children of my own...of the four-legged kind. My cocker spaniel, Haley, and a cat named NeilSedaka. If I'm not out walking the dog, you can find me on the golf course in spring, summer and fall. And in the winter, usually at the bowling alley with my bowling team.

I have been a member of Urbandale UCC since August 2005, and I feel very honored to have been asked to join the Discernment Team in fall of 2006.

Marcia (Marci) Freer: I joined UUCC in November, 2004. In addition to serving on the Discernment Team I am a member of the choir. I also work with the social team and help with memorial service receptions.

Before I moved to Grimes in June, 2004, I lived in Crete, Nebraska, where I taught psychology at Doane College for 30 years. The year after I retired from Doane I worked for the Office of Rural Health in Lincoln, NE.

I am married to Ned McPartland, who sings in the choir. We live in Grimes, 10 minutes away from my daughter, son-in-law, and three granddaughters, who live in Urbandale."

Renaë Dickinson: I joined UUCC in the Fall of 2004 along with my husband, Steve. We have three children. Sean is twenty and in his second year at DMAcc. Kyle's seventeen and a senior at Johnston High School. Emma, eleven, is a sixth grader at Summit Middle School. I work as a Dental Hygienist in a private practice in West DSM. Steve is employed as a Computer Systems Analyst at Pioneer Hi-Bred.

In my free time I enjoy reading, cooking and baking, biking, boating, and spending time with family and friends. Being a member of the UUCC has enriched my life in so many ways. I feel honored to be serving on the Discernment Team. I look forward to helping the church's members and friends envision our future together.

Karl S. Andersen: I have been a member of this congregation for six years and am delighted to tell you something about myself. I am a native of Chicago, Illinois, where I grew up, studied, married my spouse Joanne and graduated from Wabash College in Indiana before pushing off to New England for seminary studies and ordination in Amherst, Massachusetts. I served in three hospitals and three congregations (in three states: Maine, Massachusetts and Florida) before coming to Iowa, serving my last hospital as chaplain before retiring last year. I have three children, four grandchildren and one great grandson on the way.

Bea Rendon: I am 14 years old and a sophomore at Hoover High School in Des Moines. I love music, singing, and drama, and I'm actively involved in those activities at school, in addition to singing with the Iowa Youth Chorus. Recently I've been looking for ways to serve my church more, and here is an excellent way to do it! I'm very excited about being a member of the Discernment Team, because I think it's important to have a youth representative participate in developing a vision for our church's future. I am looking forward to talking with all of you during our upcoming discernment process!

Perry Washburn: I am a Hoosier native, and a graduate of Indiana University. I worked as a newspaper and magazine editor for nearly 15 years in Indiana, Michigan, New York and Idaho before becoming a stay-at-home dad when our son Daniel was little. My passions now include cooking, quartet singing, and adoption. Our daughters Aida and Madina are adopted from Kazakhstan. I began teaching cooking classes a couple of years ago in Boise. I sang in two very busy barbershop quartets in Boise, and enjoyed performing throughout the Northwest.

Steve Looney: I have attended Urbandale UCC since the age of 4. My wife Carol and I were married here and raised our three now grown children in this church. My grandson was baptized here about a year ago. I have been active on several committees including Deacons (now Worship Committee), Trustees (now Ad-ministry Team), Stewardship and Mission Interpretation, Financial Secretary, and the Church Board / Leadership Team. I am employed at the Iowa Bankers Association as VP of Technology.

Important Congregational Dates

Sunday, January 28 (after worship):	Congregational Meeting
Thursday, February 15 (7-9pm):	Congregational Discernment Meeting <i>Historical Reflection</i>
Thursday, March 29 (7-9pm):	Congregational Discernment Meeting <i>Discussion of "Norms"</i>
Thursday, April 19 (7-9pm):	Congregational Discernment Meeting <i>Ministry Assessment</i>
Wednesday, May 30 (time TBD):	Congregational Meeting

Educational Support Dates (9:45 on Sunday Morning)

February 4 & 11:	What is Discernment?
March 11:	Hardiness
March 18:	Spiritual Disciplines
March 25:	Polarity Theory
April 1:	Congregational Size Transitions

A Brief History of Recent Events

Fall 2004

- Worked with The Rev. Alice Mann, Senior Consult with the Alban Institute:
 - Colleen Borstad and Pastor Michael: “Discerning Your Congregation’s Call” (Sept)
 - Pastor Michael: “Raising the Roof: The Pastor-to-Program Size Transition” (weeklong, Oct)
- A Strategic Study Team worked on this material;
- We received many visitors and new members.

January 2005

- Congregational Meeting with the address “What Will It Take” (www.urbucc.org);
 - Voted to change our worship to two services (an experiment only for the spring);
 - Voted to raise funds for an Associate Pastor.

Spring and Summer 2005

- Results:
 - \$52,000 in “Second Mile” giving raised;
 - An Associate Pastor Search Team was organized;
- Bonita Wiley resigned as Christian Education Coordinator;
- Sunday morning worship and education schedule continued to be revised, but we maintained two services;
- We continued to receive many visitors and new members.

Fall 2005

- We began a program year dramatically understaffed;
- Hurricane Katrina occurred and we formed a task force to plan a response;
- The Associate Pastor Search Team continued its work;
- We continued to receive many visitors and new members.

November and December 2005

- Urbandale UCC called Pastor Emily to be the new Associate Pastor

Spring 2006

- “Hope Shall Bloom,” a concert benefiting St. Matthew UCC was held at UUCC, raising over \$15,000;
- Pastor Emily provided support to CE volunteers who were fatiguing as a result being understaffed;
- Leadership Team considered strategies for strategic study.

Fall 2006

- A Discernment Team was formed and prepared to facilitate a process with the congregation;
- Programs continue to be developed and supported;
- Pastors Michael and Emily studied with Alice Mann;
- The swell of visitors began to level off the dramatic peaks.

SECTION I: WHAT IS “DISCERNMENT?”

Please see the “date box” on page 4 for important Adult Education opportunities supporting this section.

“Discernment” comes from a Greek word and essentially means to “sift through.” A process of discernment calls for several components, especially as it relates to a spiritual community:

- The practice of spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, and others);
- Research and education about specific challenges facing the community at this time;
- LOTS of participation and conversation by the members;
- A spirit of compassion and a willingness to respond to God’s call

The following two devotions were written by Karl Andersen.

Devotion 1

There are a number of images which flash through my mind as I consider DISCERNMENT.

One of those images is the image of PRAYER, an image of searching for the meaning of my life and my offering before God and through the Church. Just now, the image of prayer is a traditional one, an image where I am on my knees, seeking direction and courage to live my life as faithfully and honestly as I can. This image is a very personal one, an image where I am today on my knees, another day I am seated on an airplane or a train to go someplace new and challenging for me in my ministry.

The second image is that of PLAN, an image which is like a blueprint to me but an image which includes more than myself. This image is collective, including the Urbandale UCC congregation and its many members, present and future. We are engaging in an amazing process which will lead us into the future with a vision we can not altogether understand at this moment. This is a collective image because I am no longer praying alone: I am now praying with others who belong to this congregation and who are weighing the future, working toward a vision that is agreeable to me and challenging at the same time. This collective image will come about in our process of discovering the future for our congregation with our time, treasure, talent and temper all at stake.

Devotion 2

Another way of understanding DISCERNMENT is to see it as a picture frame, surrounding the painting or the vision we are creating in this process. We have discovered two parts important for our picture, PRAYER and PLAN. To me, these are the left and the right sides of our painting, PRAYER the left and PLAN the right side.

SECTION II: HARDINESS

Please see the “date box” on page 4 for important Adult Education opportunities supporting this section.

As we start gaining clarity about our sense of call, both as individuals and as a faith community, the proverbial rubber will hit the road. Most of us have the personal experience of getting excited about a New Year’s resolution, only to have Valentine’s Day come and the resolution is long ago abandoned. It is difficult to maintain a new behavior when the predictable stress of “the new” comes along. But doing great things, or even routine activities, requires resiliency under stress. A popular psychologist, Salvatore Maddi, calls this characteristic “hardiness.”

Maddi started his research in 1975 at Illinois Bell Telephone. At the time, and over the next several years, the telecommunications industry was undergoing massive change and restructuring. Maddi and his research associates studied the business executives and were curious about why some executives became sick and often did not do well under the pressure and other executives stayed healthy and even thrived. The conclusions of his research are the components of hardiness: a personality style that shows *commitment*, *control*, and *challenge* as the foundation of successful coping with stress. I became interested in Maddi’s work during my doctoral studies, especially as it applies to pastors (whose vocations tend to be very stressful) and congregations as they seek to embody their vocation and mission (which can also be very stressful).

Before unpacking and applying Maddi’s three attitudes (commitment, control, and challenge) and two of his vital skills (transformational coping and social support), I submit two important preparatory items for the application of his work to churches: issues of covenant living and our signature story.

First, let’s consider issues inherent in covenant living. As any former Confirmation student of mine can (hopefully) attest, there is a fundamental difference between a promise and a covenant, namely that a covenant is a two-way agreement. Covenant living is relational living and requires a lot of “tending,” meaning, we have to talk. Covenant living requires us to balance the needs of individuals and the needs of the whole group. Simply imposing the “will of the majority” is *not* covenant living. Neither is letting the esoteric needs of a few shape all of our decisions.

A good example is our struggles around worship. What does inclusive worship look like in a covenant community? Hard to tell! But I usually know it as we approximate it: there is a place for all; we don’t usually get everything we want; all ages are acknowledged and affirmed; diverse images of God are affirmed; there is a mix of “speak and listen,” “quiet and active,” “formal and approachable” (just to name a few characteristics).

In order to enter Maddi’s three attitudes, I believe we also need to examine our signature stories. Signature stories are the narrative we use to define and describe ourselves. We all have them; they are the stories we think are in some way unique to us. They are similar to a signature “style;” for example, I always wear cufflinks and trouser braces

Maddi's Three Attitudes of Hardiness

Salvatore Maddi suggests three attitudes of hardiness that I find particularly useful as we attempt to enact our call with focus and resolve (individually or as a community):

1. Commitment
 - Having a sense of something that is greater than ourselves;
 - Viewing our work as worthwhile and requiring our full attention, imagination, and effort;
 - Avoids withdrawal from the natural stressors;
 - Toughs it out when need be.

2. Control
 - Positively approaching and influencing the outcome of necessary changes;
 - Refusal to be passive and play the victim;
 - Is not manipulative—this attitude is not “controlling;”
 - Gracefully accepts those changes that are outside our control;
 - Realizes that even if we cannot control a change or our environment, we can control our attitude at all times.

3. Challenge
 - Fundamental optimism: sees challenges as opportunity for growth;
 - Sees change as instrumental in opening up the new and unforeseen;
 - Avoids denial and avoidance behaviors;
 - Realistically addresses problems and seeks “win-win” solutions.

Time for Reflection:

1. What are your “core” commitments (i.e., what are you committed to beyond yourself)?

2. Give an honest assessment of your attitude of control. Do you normally “play the victim” (i.e., self pity), seek to be manipulative, or positively adjust your attitude?

3. Give an honest assessment of your challenge attitude. Do you crumble immediately before a difficult situation, adapt pretty well, or “roll up your sleeves and get to work”?

Maddi's Two Vital Skills

Supporting his three attitudes, Maddi offers several skills. The following two I find the most useful and applicable to our current work.

1. Transformational Coping (versus regressive coping)
 - a. Keeps a broader perspective
 - i. Understands that we are not as unique as we sometimes think we are. Others have gone through these events, too;
 - ii. Sees the future as a place where we are going and it will be “good”.
 - b. Turns the change to your advantage;
 - c. Alters events so that they are less stressful;
 - d. Regressive coping views events pessimistically.

2. Social Support Network
 - a. Engages with others, does not alienate;
 - b. Solves conflicts by interaction and looking for “win-win”, not just focused on my wants;
 - c. Preserves relationships, even when there is a disagreement.

Time for Reflection:

From time to time, we all use a regressive coping style. Reflect back on a time when you engaged in a regressive coping style. (This time was marked by you feeling as if you were unique and alone in the universe, feeling like no one has ever gone through what you were going through, no one can understand you, and the future is just going to be “bad.”) Write down specific ways that you could change your coping style to “transformational.” Who were (or could have been) your social support network?

SECTION III: POLARITY THEORY

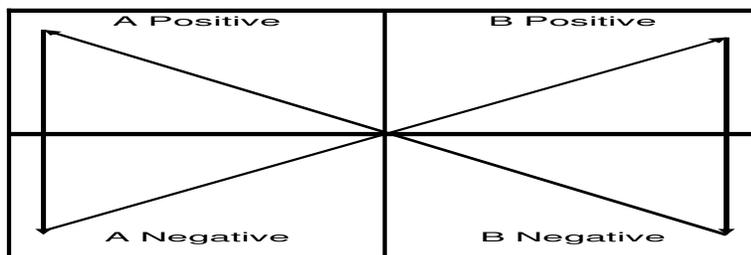
Please see the “date box” on page 4 for important Adult Education opportunities supporting this section.

When it came to problem solving, my father use to say two things: “every problem has a solution” and “more than half the job is having the right tool.” And I think he is right on both counts.

Problems have solutions, that is, an answer. In the linear math equation, $2 + 2 = 4$, 4 is the “answer” to the problem. Solutions to problems may only come after a great deal of research and consideration. There may be a number of satisfactory outcomes, and the solution may need “maintenance” in order to keep working; however, a list of desired outcomes can be created that are better than other options.

There are, however, situations that do not have a clearly desirable outcome. In fact, we have all been presented with situations where a simple “pros and cons” list not only ends in a tie, but where it is hard to decide what items are really a “pro” and which are a “con.” These situations are *not* problems, but are a polarity. A common mantra in polarity theory helps clarify the differences: problems can be solved; conflicts can be resolved; but polarities can only be managed, more or less well.¹

Polarities are unsolvable and unavoidable situations that must be managed. Barry Johnson, an international expert on polarity management, submits that “polarities to manage are sets of opposites which can’t function well independently. Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you cannot choose one as a ‘solution’ and neglect the other.”² A polarity can be diagrammed this way:



The easiest polarity to imagine is one you are engaged in right now: breathing. The act of respiration has two interdependent poles: inhalation (A Side) and exhalation (B Side). The A Positive aspect of inhalation is when we take in a breath of air our bodies are filled with oxygen to nourish our cells. Deep breaths are good for us. Unfortunately, if all we did was inhale, soon we would begin to buildup carbon dioxide in our blood. The exclusionary practice of the A Positive side eventually leads us to decline into the A Negative quadrant. As a result, we engage a corrective and cross to the B Positive: we

exhale. The carbon dioxide rushes out and we prevent the poisoning of our bodies. Again, however, if we linger too long on the B Positive, we will naturally decline into the B Negative quadrant; we will become oxygen deprived.

Breathing is not a problem to be solved, there is not a solution. It is not a conflict to be resolved, there is not a resolution. It is a polarity: there are two opposite actions that must be taken in order for life to be sustained. Other common polarities are: Individual and Team, Planning and Action, Stability and Change. Roy Oswald is fond of presenting a prayer polarity: kataphatic prayer and apophatic prayer. Kataphatic prayer is an “active” prayer in which we bring our petitions, needs and concerns to God. In the negative quadrant, however, we might become consumed with our own agenda and never stop and listen for God’s agenda. Apophatic prayer is more “quiet,” often marked by sitting meditation. It comes from the Eastern traditions of Christian mysticism and Asian religions. In the negative quadrant of apophatic prayer we might note that this form can become passive and never allows for the expression of our own needs.³ The goal, of course, is to seek a balance.

Barry Johnson makes the following observations about polarity management:

- In order to manage a polarity effectively, you will have to see all four quadrants of the Polarity Map. Seeing all four quadrants is “seeing the whole picture”;⁴
- Whenever there is a push for a shift from one pole of a polarity to the other side, it is because those pushing are:
 - Experiencing or anticipating the downsides of the present pole which they identify as the “problem,” and,
 - They are attracted to the upsides of the other pole which they identify as the “solution;”⁵
- When either of these efforts is treated like a problem to solve rather than as part of a polarity to manage, the effort is much less effective than it could be. In Polarity Management terms, you will:
 - Generate unnecessary and costly resistance, and
 - Spend needless time in the downside of one or both of the two poles.⁶

Time for Reflection:

Two common polarities that churches often face are:

- Outreach (money spent on others) and Inreach (money spent on ourselves), and
- Strategic Planning and Action

Plot the polarity in the charts provided below. Remember, the negative quadrants are what naturally happen if we only do one side of the polarity.

An additional chart is provided for you to plot a polarity from your life.

Outreach (Positive)	Inreach (Positive)
Outreach (Negative)	Inreach (Negative)

Strategic Planning (Positive)	Action (Positive)
Strategic Planning (Negative)	Action (Negative)

A (Positive)	B (Positive)
A (Negative)	B (Negative)

SECTION IV: CONGREGATIONAL SIZE TRANSITIONS

Please see the “date box” on page 4 for important Adult Education opportunities supporting this section.

Three Different Parties

*A big mansion is not simply a bungalow with more rooms,
a big party is not simply an intimate dinner with more people,
a big metropolitan hospital is not simply a clinic with more beds and more doctors,
a big corporation is not simply a family firm with more employees and products,
a big government is not simply a town council with more branches.⁷*

Imagine that you were to host three separate parties in your home: a gathering of four, a dinner party for 10, and a potluck for 20. At my house, I often have four people over for dinner. The dining room and table are spacious and I have plenty of china to make it as casual or fancy as I choose. The dinner conversation will probably center on a single topic and speaker at a time. We can easily play a game or probably come to consensus on a film to watch. If people don't already know each other, they can easily become acquaintances and it will be my “duty” as host to help them do so.

When hosting a dinner party for 10, I need to add the extra leaf for the table and even then it is a tight fit. I still have enough tableware, but nearly all must be deployed. The conversation will rarely focus on one person speaking as many conversations will be happening at one time. Unless we have specifically come together to play a game or watch a film, it is unlikely that we will even try to reach consensus on such an activity. If people don't already know each other, I will introduce them to each other and help them connect, but each person now bears a bit more responsibility for connecting to others.

If 20 people (or more) were to come to my home it would *have* to be a potluck. My guests would not be able to eat at the dining room table; instead, it would be turned into a *servng* table. The food will be quite diverse and unless I have asked people to bring a specific item, it might be poorly balanced. It would have to be held in a warm season because the house won't comfortably hold many more people and some may wish to be on the patio or playing croquet on the lawn. People who don't know each other will have to take a greater responsibility for their own introductions; I will likely be deployed to keep dishes hot and ice flowing.

These are three very different gatherings of people. Each is enjoyable and can nurture relationships among people, but each gathering will have a very different “feel.” Each gathering requires a different type of planning and a different style of hosting to be a success.

Time for Reflection:

What are your experiences of hosting different gatherings? Of attending?

Churches are Different Sizes, Too

In the mid-1980s, Arlin Rothauge, an Episcopal priest, presented a theory of the congregational life of churches. His task was to help nurture congregational evangelism and growth and he noticed that churches often behaved similarly and had the same types of challenges when they were about the same size. He posited four church sizes: family, pastoral, program, and corporate. His quintessential work has been reviewed and revised for over twenty years. The following categorical descriptions are primarily a review and integration of the size categories by Alban Institute consultants Alice Mann and Roy Oswald.⁸

Family Size Church (up to 50 people attending worship): a single-cell organism resembling an extended family where, as they say on *Cheers*, “everyone knows your name.” People primarily enter the “family” by birth, marriage, or a slow process of adoption.

Pastors are often part-time and serve as “chaplain to the ‘family’” and there is high clergy turnover. The real leadership (even if not “formalized” by their constitution or congregational vote) is often a matriarch, a patriarch, or a central family, and the pastor’s job is to preach and provide pastoral care. It can easily take five years for the church to take the pastor seriously, because there is usually a short tenure and long gaps between clergy (as a result of low salaries). Patriarchs and matriarchs direct the church and provide assurance that the pastor will not take them into new directions. The pastor can work with the “parents’” permission to establish new ministries, but to run ahead will cause significant problems.

The church is often known in the community for a central ministry or annual event, usually a direct service to the community, which is offered in a “down-home” style where everyone is invited to a “family celebration.”

Pastoral Size Church (51 to 150 attending worship): the church begins to move toward a multi-cell organism with the pastor at the center of several overlapping circles of friendship and involvement.

The church is generally able to support a full-time pastor as it moves closer to 100 in worship and is big enough to “look like a real church” to visitors. If the pastor “fits well” with the community and key leadership of the church (a measure of cultural competence and match) significant spiritual coherence can result.

The pastor and a small cadre of lay leaders lead the church and the central key to leadership is good communication with the congregation. Most people experience their spiritual needs being met through a personal relationship with the pastor, who is readily available at times of crisis and celebration (clergy are at every meeting and make every hospital call). Parishioners do not usually need to make an appointment with their pastor and the personal needs of church members are met immediately.

Until they reach the upper ends of this size (growing closer to 150 in worship), members are able to greet each other by name and easily recognize visitors. Clergy tend to stay longer and church growth usually depends on a “popular pastor.” A healthy pastoral

church usually has two or three significant ministries, including worship with a personal touch. One of the most difficult aspects of upward size transitions is the loss of this level of familiarity.

Frequently clergy who feel that they have to “do it all” are the barrier to moving to the next size. The pastor needs to delegate authority, assign responsibilities and praise accomplishments. Further, as the church grows, the time demands on the pastor can become very intrusive as pastors are often forced to choose between work and their family.

Program Size Church (151 to 400 attending worship): 66% of mainline Protestant congregations have less than 150 in worship and 80% have less than 200, so comparably few congregations are this size.

As a church moves beyond about 150 in worship, the pastor, no matter how “popular” or talented, is no longer able to be the center of every activity and is unable to maintain personal spiritual relationships with every member. Programs must now begin to fill these roles in order for people to increase the depth of their discipleship. If the pastor attempts to stay at the center, he or she will quickly burn out.

The pastor is still the center of a great deal of activity, but the pastor’s time is mostly spent helping the church clarify its sense of mission and equipping and sustaining the lay leaders to provide high quality programs that are linked to this mission. In so doing, the pastor is able to equip the church and church members to actualize their ministry to more people. The first job of the pastor is to make sure that the system runs well.

In a Program Church, lay leaders guide multiple cells of activity. Beyond leading these cells of activity (committees, teams, and other groups), the lay leaders often provide a measure of care to the members of these subgroups. For example, if a member of the choir is in the hospital, the choir will usually lead an effort to provide visitation and care. The key is in the coordination of the efforts.

While the church is known in the community for the quality and variety of programs, which provide for varied entry points into the church life, there is often a sense of grief for some church members as they move beyond 150 in worship. Many took pride in being able to greet everyone by name and there was probably only one worship service. As the church moves closer to 200 in worship, it is very likely that additional worship options will become necessary. The pastor is no longer to attend every meeting or go “calling” on everyone and now members need to make an appointment, often having to wait a couple of weeks, in order to meet with the pastor.

Corporate Size Church (401 to 1000 attending worship): often known for the excellence in their program offerings, especially worship and music. They often have the “best” organs and choirs in town; it is not uncommon for corporate sized churches to have a fine arts program and touring choirs. They have a wide range of programs to very specific groups of people (e.g., not just ministries to seniors, but to widows/widowers, too; not just groups for families, but specific configurations of families). Often these groups form “subcongregations” and have their own paid staff and become a primary avenue of pastoral care.

Senior Pastors of Corporate Size churches usually spend most of their time preparing sermons/worship and supervising a diverse staff of ministry professionals; few parishioners know the Senior Pastor very well. In the largest corporate sized congregations, it is not uncommon to separate the duties of the Senior Pastor, who preaches and is the “figure head” of the large operation, and the “Head of Staff” who manages the daily operations and supervises the staff. Decisions are made by a complicated multi-layered organization of staff, boards, and committees.

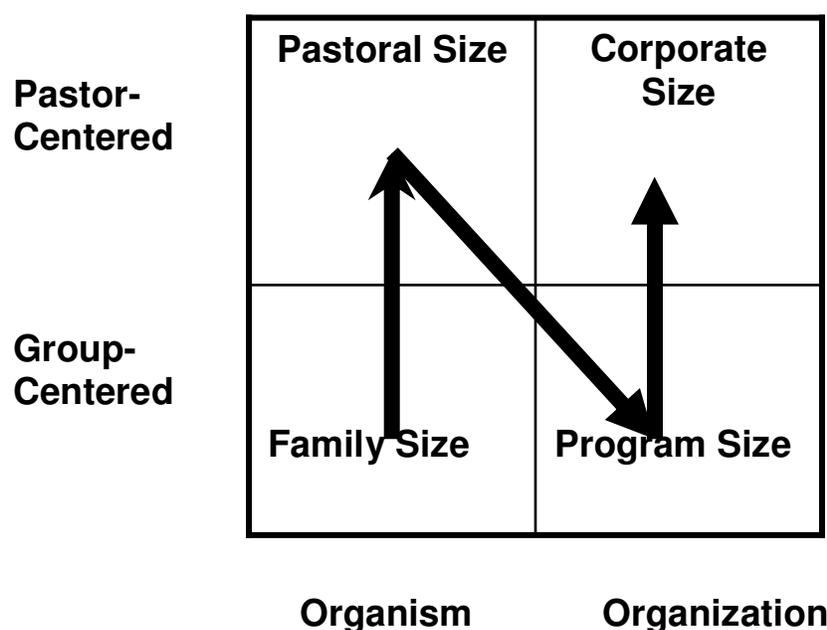
Time for Reflection:

In your own words, describe the differences of different congregational sizes. Reflect on different churches of which you have been a part. If you are interested, there is another model of imagining and “labeling” congregations as presented by Gary McIntosh at the end of this section.

Size Transitions

A church, prompted by growth, does not simply step up in size like a staircase and neither is congregational growth simply a slope on a graph. Alice Mann submits that “when organisms change significantly in size, they must also change in form”⁹ and she posits growth on an “N-Curve.”

Alice Mann’s Size Transition “N-Curve”¹⁰



Organism or Organization indicates how a church is organized and operates: family and pastoral sized churches act more like a person (organism) than an organization; there is structure, but not much “order.” Group or Pastor Centered indicate who “drives” the systems.

The *family size* church behaves like a person and the primary decisions are made by the matriarchs and patriarchs (**organic** and **group-centered**). The *pastoral size* church still behaves like a person, but now the pastor takes a more prominent leadership role (**organic** and **pastor-centered**).

The *program size* and *corporate size* congregations require much more organization so that programs can provide opportunities for creating and sustaining meaningful relationships. These “organizations” are the primary avenues to increase their sense of connection and opportunities for spiritual growth. Often, instead of introducing someone to the pastor, a visitor will be introduced to the leader or a member of a particular ministry. The focus is on **organization**, and what distinguishes the program size and corporate size is not just the number of members and number of ministries, but also the role of the Senior Pastor. A corporate sized congregation, particularly as it grows ever larger, has a “larger-than-life” preacher and therefore is **pastor-centered**.

There are six possible size transitions (assuming movement along both directions of the arrows) and each requires a reorientation in the relationships and structure of the congregation's life and ministry. The diagonal transition from the pastoral- to program-size church is the only transition that requires both an organic and organizational change. This transition, therefore, becomes the most difficult for a congregation to navigate and is the transition that Urbandale UCC is attempting to negotiate. Much research has been done, however, and many of the barriers are known and so are appropriate strategies for growth.

Time for Reflection:

If you have been part of a size transition (especially of Urbandale UCC), reflect on your experience.

A Hidden Zone: The Plateau Zone

As a church moves beyond 100 in worship and approaches the larger end of the pastoral sized spectrum, several challenges begin to emerge; two are immediately obvious, even though they are usually “unconscious.” Roy Oswald speculates:

Many churches make an unconscious choice not to make the transition and keep hovering around the level of 150 average worship attendance. The two treasured features of a Pastoral Church that will be lost if it becomes a Program Church are ready access to their religious leader and the feeling of oneness as a church family, where everyone knows everyone else and the church can function as a single cell community.¹¹

Often, in *very unconscious ways*, a church will hang a sign outside the building that indicates “No Vacancies.” By making unconscious decisions to hold on to the ways of life and ministry from a previous size, churches do not leave room for growth. When churches affirm as their highest priorities a personal relationship with the pastor and knowing everyone's name, which is only able to be sustained (without pastoral burnout) in congregations with 100-150 in worship, the congregation creates a “zero sum” scenario. Imagine it as a jar of marbles that is completely full. The only way to get ten more marbles in the jar is to take out ten others.

Each size transition has a hidden “plateau zone,” a zone in which worship attendance will fluctuate above and under, but a zone that also appears to be a glass ceiling. The pastoral-to-program size plateau zone is a worship attendance between 150 and 250. A frequent crisis in the plateau occurs when the church relies on the informal structures of

operation, but attempts to formalize how they do ministry. Many may feel like they have lost some of the “charm” of the church. Unless the congregation decides to steadily and systematically address the size transition, most notably in addressing the barriers to growth listed below, they are likely to remain systemically frustrated and may eventually stagnate any future attempts at growth. Alice Mann notes three typical expressions of congregational ambivalence frequently contributing to a sustained plateau zone:

1. While the pastor and evangelism committee work hard on growth and welcome, members frequently say that it would be best to remain small so that we can all know each other;
2. Growth plans are presented primarily as medicine to cure a budget squeeze; leaders hesitate to say that the congregation might have a vocation to reach more people;
3. Though members describe the church as welcoming to newcomers, leaders hear many complaints about plans to add capacity (for example, by adding a worship service, expanding the staff, or buying land for parking).¹²

Time for Reflection:

Our Conference Minister, The Rev. Dr. Rich Pleva, has a saying: “all change is loss; all loss must be grieved.” As we have added members, what has changed for you and therefore is a loss?

Barriers To Growth¹³

***First Barrier:** We are unclear whether we have a vocation to make room for more of our neighbors in order to serve a growing community.*

Alan Klaas conducted research on congregations and classified churches according to the way pastors and congregants described the sense of purpose or calling. His categories are summarized below.

Three Types of Churches
B ₂ : Primary commitment to strengthen current members; (40% of U.S. Churches)
B ₁ : “Interested” in ministering beyond membership, but no firm plan; Unwilling to change to remove barriers; believe that growth can come without change and change can come without conflict; (30-40% of U.S. Churches)
A: Outward focus; “Mission Outpost;” make the changes required to reach others in the community; ministry of invitation and/or ministries of service; what was the last change the church made in order to reach those whom God was calling us to reach; (20-30% of U.S. Churches)

Only the groups in the “A” category demonstrated significant growth “in the variety and depth of their ministry, increased financial support, . . . increases in members who were previously unchurched, and increases in membership.”¹⁴ Those who were B₂ or B₁ saw, at best, stability and usually declined in ministry, financial support, and membership.

At the center of church life must be the congregation’s vocation, or sense of call. The center cannot be a pastor or the staff, but members working to actualize their sense of communal mission. A delicate balance must be maintained between “in reach” (what congregations do and spend to increase the spiritual life of the current worshipping members) and “out reach” (what congregations do and spend to extend “holy hospitality” to folk beyond their borders). Congregations that are unclear about their vocation will decline; no amount of technical expertise or financial support will compensate for the absence of a clear vision.

Time for Reflection:

Give an honest assessment, is Urbandale UCC an A, B₁, or B₂ church?

Second Barrier: *We are unclear about size plateau concepts or realities.*

Following on the first barrier, lack of vocational clarity, churches that are unclear about the realities of a size transition and difficulties of breaking through the plateau zone will not grow. Growth for growth sake might only be masked greed and vanity. Growth must come as a result of a clear vision for reaching neighbors with the Good News. Growth must come as a result of a desire to increase discipleship and strengthen people on their spiritual journeys. Only then can congregations learn about themselves, increase their hardiness, and be willing to face the challenges that will take several years to address.

Third Barrier: *Our space is effectively “filled up.”*

Churches are “full” and discourage frequent attendance when 80% of the desirable seats are filled on a regular basis. The seats at the front and those on the sides do not count (think of it in terms of a movie theatre—people will sit on the sides and in the front, but most prefer to sit on the aisle and in the middle). Each person (in primarily middle-class, Caucasian congregations) needs 30 to 36 inches.

What is true in the sanctuary is also true in the classrooms and in the parking lot. When classrooms are crowded, attendance will be suppressed. When there is not adequate and easily identifiable parking close to the building for the visitor who is going to arrive five minutes before (or after) the service begins, they will not feel welcomed. (It is irrelevant that we think this is “ridiculous;” it is how a visitor thinks that matters, if we are going to offer them “holy hospitality.”)

Time for Reflection:

Does the space “required” for a person seem too much for you? Go measure—I, too, was surprised on how accurate it is!

Try sitting in a “non-preferred” seat one Sunday (side or very front). They are noticeably uncomfortable.

Fourth Barrier: *We are not staffed for growth.*

Staffing will be addressed in a following section, but churches often deleteriously violate a mantra: staff first, program second, building third. Churches regularly assume that “if we build it, they will come.” When churches spend all their resources to build a new building, which will usually initially attract new visitors, but then do not have the resources to staff the necessary programs to nurture their new members, they will see decline, feel very discouraged, and not have resources for growth.

Fifth Barrier: *Our concept of an “adequate” budget does not permit growth.*

The “sticker shock” of a size transition often frightens congregations and prompts them to pull back. Here, again, is why the congregation must understand this transition as part of their call, their summons, and what God *needs* them to do. Churches will often need to come up with additional strategies to increase income, will need members to give “sacrificially” to the mission (even as transitions cause frustration), and will need to develop the stewardship of new members (often a matter of spiritual healing).

Sixth Barrier: *Our ministry infrastructure is inadequate for movement to the next size.*

There are several ministry infrastructure changes that must occur to successfully navigate the size transition and to maintain an environment that sustains its extravagant hospitality and develops greater discipleship.

New Member Incorporation: There needs to be a well-honed three-part system of invitation:

1. Proclamation/Evangelism (getting the message out);
2. Welcoming when they come;
3. Helping them find their way into the family/organization.

Member Ministry Development: The “time and talent” identification strategies must be a yearlong process where members are frequently recruited to offer their gifts to the church. As a church makes the size transition, the need for well-trained, supported volunteers increases exponentially and needs to be a higher priority of the staff.

Pastoral Care: One of the most difficult, but imperative, changes that must occur for the transition from pastoral-to-program size requires the renegotiation of expectations about the delivery of pastoral care. While the pastor in a pastoral size church probably made all the calls in times of crisis and celebration, for the pastor to be the only “mediator” of the presence of God is to short change God and others. What was probably not a good idea in the pastoral size church becomes impossible (or a recipe for burnout) in the program size church. The pastor’s(s’) main task (but not only) in pastoral care is to empower, equip, and sustain a diverse group of pastoral caregivers.

Adult Faith Formation & Small-Group Ministry: There needs to be a repeated series of adult faith formation classes for new members who come into the church, particularly for those who have been wounded somewhere else and for those who are now in a different faith tradition. Further, the discipleship of all members is nurtured by a varied offering of small groups with multiple and frequent opportunities to join a new group. The easiest group to join is a newly formed group.

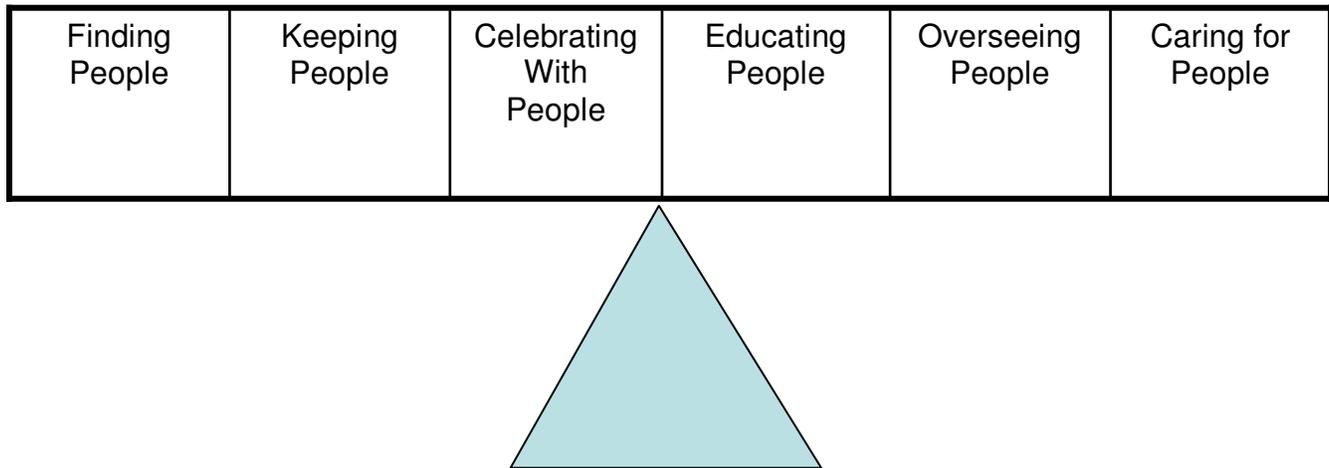
Board & Staff Team Development: The role of the governing board needs to move away from informal and “hands-on” processes to a more formal process with concern for overarching goals and policy setting. The Senior Pastor must act as a “head of staff” and spend substantial time developing the staff and leadership of the church.

Time for Reflection:

“...for the pastor to be the only ‘mediator’ of the presence of God is to short change God and others.” What does this phrase mean to you?

Staffing The Church

McIntosh's Fulcrum of Key Roles/Tasks (*Staff Your Church for Growth*, chapter 2)



As mentioned earlier, a critical mantra for growth is: staff first, program second, building third. A church has to build its staff with folk who are committed to developing and sustaining programs and program leaders. Only then, if growth has been maintained, should a church consider expanding its space. (Often, with a more creative use of the facilities, churches can avoid building for several years.)

There has been considerable research on the necessary staff ratios and most support the ratio of one full-time pastor to every 125-150 worshipping members.¹⁵ The challenge, however, is that you cannot wait until you reach the next marker to add the staff (e.g., waiting until there are 300 worshipers to add a second pastor). While you do not want to overstaff, waiting too long will cause both decline in attendance and burnout in the current staff. With each step, appropriate program support staff (music and education) and operational staff (office and building) need to be increased.

McIntosh also presents a fulcrum of pastoral roles. Six functions are broadly categorized as helping people find the spiritual home that they need and helping them grow in their discipleship. The total staffing picture must yield a balanced fulcrum, or the system will see decline. (The labels should be self-explanatory; e.g. "Overseeing People" means leadership development.)

The key functions of *all the staff* in a growing church are to empower, equip, and sustain the membership to be developed in their ministry skills to actualize their mission. Two of the best indicators of poor leadership are a burned out staff and ministries that fail or end when a staff person leaves their position. The church is responsible for their ministries; the staff simply serves as coach, cheerleader, and resource manager.

Time for Reflection:

Give an honest assessment: draw your current perception of the Urbandale UCC key roles fulcrum. Are we balanced or out of balance?

Urbandale United Church of Christ: A Place For All at the Parties

At the beginning of this section (page 15), I asked you to imagine hosting three different types of parties: a gathering of four, a dinner party for 10, and a potluck for 20 or more. Each requires a different type of preparation and a different hosting style. Now imagine the church as a party that God is asking us to host. At God's party, everyone is invited. At God's table, there is room for everyone.

If we are going to be well-prepared hosts of God's party, there are several steps that are going to need tending:

Clarity of Call and Vocation: Every other preparation revolves around the clarity of our call as a congregation. Each church is called to proclaim the Good News and deepen the discipleship of its members. However, each congregation must also discern the particulars of the "how." A clearly discerned sense of call must take the center of our organizational life.

Develop as an Ongoing Learning Community: While every congregation would benefit by having a clearly articulated sense of mission at the center of its activity, a congregation that is facing a size transition (especially the pastor-to-program transition) must understand itself as an ongoing learning community. Gone are the days of 10-year long-range plans; plans of that length do not stimulate the ongoing learning of the community. Cultural trends and the accompanying spiritual needs of communities are dynamic and not static processes. Only when a congregation continues to evaluate its ministries, is guided by the past and not bound to it, and keeps current on congregational research can it keep its mission fresh and relevant in the world.

Make Space for God's Guests: We have made the changes necessary in worship to accommodate visitors. Based on the average of 33 inches per person, our target worship zone per service is between 100 and 175 in each service; even better is 125 to 150. Any time we sustain numbers over 175 or under 100 (between 80% and 50% capacity of desirable sets), we will suppress frequent attendance. Our difficult challenges, of course, are in the other parts of the building and the parking lot.

Staff for Growth:

To fully support the ministries of Urbandale United Church of Christ, the staff picture should resemble the following:

Staffed for Growth: Urbandale United Church of Christ	
FT Senior Pastor:	Pastor Michael Worship, Staff Development, Vision & Pastoral Care
FT Associate Pastor:	Pastor Emily Education, Small Group Ministries & Outreach
PT Music Staff:	Elsie and Bobby (and volunteers)
FT Office Support:	Tara Aukes
PT Office Support:	Data management & Volunteers
PT Building Support:	Ron Johnston
PT Program Support:	To Be Filled

Faithful and Creative Stewardship: Few churches rely solely on member giving to furnish the total necessary revenue of the ministries (we have been blessed!). Churches in the pastoral-to-program size transition, especially when faced with “sticker shock,” are often unable to fully fund their ministries off the current pledge base alone.

Develop our Ministry Infrastructure: The following items are “under construction”

- Membership Team: has been working to increase their follow-up with new members and will oversee a comprehensive yearlong advertising strategy;
- Technology Updates: a technology firm has been employed by UCC and our technology “crisis” is being stabilized; when this is completed, a thorough review of our technological capacities will commence; smarter use of technology should increase our productivity, especially in “volunteer management”;
- Pastoral Care: a new training program for a more coordinated/integrated effort of member care is under review with a training and test period expected in Lent 2007;
- Small Groups: new groups are being prepared for Lent 2007 (as an experiment) with a more substantial rollout in the fall of 2007;
- Updates of operating policies and procedures:
 - Child safety has been addressed (and will continue to be reviewed);
 - Community Concerns is updating their project procedures;
 - Communications (print, email, and web) will be reviewed after an update from Community Concerns

The Conclusion or the Beginning?

These are just the initial steps toward the future God needs us to embrace. So much of the infrastructure of the congregation is being developed that it is impossible to keep this section updated. These are, however, ideas and concepts that we will have to continue to review and take action on in order to make space for all the guests at the party. It is important work. After all, regardless of whether we have been members of this church for decades or just came for the first time today, we are still guests at God’s table—and very welcome guests at that!

McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes

The following chart is developed throughout Gary McIntosh's *One Size Doesn't Fit All*. It is the same concept as Mann and Oswald, just differently imagined.

Factors	Small Church	Medium Church	Large Church
Size	15-200 worshippers	201-400 worshippers	401+ worshippers
Orientation	Relational	Programmatical	Organizational
Structure	Single Cell	Stretched Cell	Multiple Cell
Leadership	Resides in key families	Resides in committees	Resides in select leaders
Pastor	Lover	Administrator	Leader
Decisions	Made by congregation Driven by history	Made by committees Driven by changing needs	Made by staff and leaders Driven by vision
Staff	Bivocational or sole pastor	Pastor and Small Staff	Multiple Staff
Change	Bottom up through key people	Middle out through key committees	Top down through key leaders
Growth Patterns	Attraction model through relationships	Program model through key ministries	Proclamation model through word of mouth
Growth Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small-church image ▪ Ineffective evangelism ▪ Inadequate programming ▪ Downward momentum ▪ Ingrown fellowship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inadequate facilities ▪ Inadequate staff ▪ Inadequate finances ▪ Poor administration ▪ Increasing complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor assimilation ▪ Increased bureaucracy ▪ Poor communication ▪ Loss of vision ▪ Lack of member care
Growth Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renew a sense of purpose ▪ Begin new ministries ▪ Cultivate evangelism ▪ Celebrate victories ▪ Start new groups/classes ▪ Involve new people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop distinct identity ▪ Add additional staff ▪ Use facilities multiple times ▪ Offer multiple worship services ▪ Write a long-range plan ▪ Improve quality of ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renew the vision ▪ Design assimilation plan ▪ Streamline procedures ▪ Offer need-based events ▪ Adjust leadership roles ▪ Increase number of small groups

Citations

¹Oswald, 32.

²Johnson, xviii.

³Oswald, xiv-xvi.

⁴Johnson, 5.

⁵*Ibid*, 7.

⁶*Ibid*, 13.

⁷Kirkpatrick Sale, *Human Scale* (Ray, 63.)

⁸See Mann *Raising the Roof*, p 7 and Oswald, *Discerning Your Congregation's Future*, pp 149ff.

⁹Mann, *The In-Between Church*, 1.

¹⁰*Ibid*, chapter 3.

¹¹Oswald, 155.

¹²Mann, *Raising the Roof*, 11.

¹³Mann, *Raising the Roof*, Chapter 2.

¹⁴Mann, *Raising the Roof*, 18.

¹⁵McIntosh cites several studies in chapter 3 of *Staff Your Church for Growth*.

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URBANDALE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Urbandale Church is an active and dynamic congregation with a rich history and an exciting ministry to the community.

Our church is a part of a blend of four major Protestant denominations that united together in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ. We claim the early Pilgrim and Puritan settlers of this country as part of our heritage, and embrace the thought of Pastor John Robinson, who in his farewell remarks to the Pilgrims as they were leaving for the “new world” said,

“There is still more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word.”

It is that pioneering spirit that calls us to continue “Moving Forward in Faith.” It is that same spirit that calls us to covenant together to be “a community which remains open to the challenges of the Christian faith.” GOD IS STILL SPEAKING, As such:

“We welcome into this community of faith, and affirm the participation in all aspects of church life, persons of every age, race, gender, nationality, ability, and sexual orientation. We will continue our efforts toward inclusiveness, and stand against all forms of discrimination. We will empower ourselves, our children, and one another to be fully present in the world, living in Christ’s image and striving for justice and peace.”

We welcome you into the full life and participation of this lively congregation. If our church staff can be of assistance to you in any way, please feel free to call upon them.

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Church Office hours are 9:00a to 3:00p



If you would like to make a prayer request during the week, call Joyce Bixby at 279-6871 or e-mail her at bix279@juno.com. The Prayer Circle members look forward to lifting up anyone who needs spiritual support through prayer.