

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Your **Visioning Team** developed this document to answer questions we expect you will have. We will update it as we go along with changes and updates noted in blue.

Haven't we done this before? Why are we doing it again?

1. In the last decade, our church discussions have targeted specific issues or responded to major challenges such as preparing for a ministerial call. Now we have stable leadership and the opportunity to think broadly about what God is calling First Church to do to make our community and the world better.
2. Together, let's wrestle with the pivotal question: why is First Church important in the world, and to what purpose are we called in this time and this place, under God?
3. The truth is, we haven't been here before! The world is changing in the wake of the pandemic and many other pressures. Much of what we have considered "normal" may have been altered forever. So, how are we changing? To what are we now being called? What are we discovering about the essence of being a person of faith in the world today?
4. With stable, wonderful pastoral leadership, and with new resources from the parsonage, our stewardship opportunity – and obligation – is heightened. We are blessed, so how do we make these blessing matter for the benefit of all – those in need, lost, forgotten, alone, and for the generations to come?

Is the Visioning Team going to recommend how the parsonage money is spent?

Yes and no. The Visioning Team will listen deeply to you and all members, distill what we hear and present back to you what we learn. The report will articulate goals and may offer recommendations and alternatives, but its overall purpose is to help us, all together, form a common vision.

What is the time frame for all this?

The time frame for the work of the Visioning Team is 18 months with a plan to present to the congregation in the Spring of 2022.

The time frame *to carry out our collective shared vision?* We anticipate that the Church will be engaged in the "becoming" that is called into being through this work for a minimum of ten years.

Where is God's presence in this process, work and product?

God's presence in this work is critical and must be held within each of us throughout the entire process. The Team is aware and engaged with the Holy Spirit in meetings, opening and closing with prayer and pausing at significant moments in conversation to listen for God's nudgings. The

Team members have a covenant that they will listen deeply, speak clearly, kindly and gently, and be genuinely curious. They will ground their work in prayer, discernment and the Spirit. They set times to meet separately without an agenda that revolves around tasks, to pray and discern God's presence and will.

God's presence is also reflected in and through you; please pray for your Visioning Team.

How will my voice be included?

The Visioning Team is planning a variety of ways in which voices will be included: cottage meetings, small group discussions, small congregational meetings, direct communication and phone calls. Each team member will be accessible by email and/or phone. We want to hear how God is speaking to you and what you are hearing when you listen for that "still, small voice".

Who is responsible for the final decision-making?

You are. We all will be, with input from God. Through conversation, prayer, discernment and led by the Holy Spirit, the congregation will make all decisions. The Team is just a midwife. The vision for the Church's future will be shared among all members.

How will all who want to be involved be included?

The Team will cast a wide net. Thinking in concentric circles that embrace our congregation, community leaders in Burlington, and populations that are not currently represented or often heard in these discussions. The Team *will* reach out to those who do not have technology with mailings and phone calls.

Further, the Team requests that you make sure "your people" are invited to engage with this process (those who sit in your section of the church, when you do gather, family, friends), . The Team realizes that the early church grew through "cells of influence"; we know this work will be well informed using a similar approach.

We also intend to reach out to community leaders, merchants who have invested in us, those who live on the fringes, and those who we miss because we do not see them often now.

What are you asking of me? How can I participate?

The Team asks for your:

- * Prayer support
- * Participation in the process, whenever and wherever you can
- * Thoughtful responses to questions posed, visions cast, and proposals made
- * Deep engagement so that you can "own" the results
- * Voice to make sure we hear you and hear *from* you
- * Openness, understanding that, by definition, growth means change, both inward and outward, and that we are being called to a season of transformation and growth. We seek your openness to God's call, discernment of/for what that might be, your willingness to dream, your vulnerability to engaging risk, and your willingness to be transformed, individually and collectively.

What does it mean to “have a new vision” for First Church?

God calls us to grow and change as we live our lives; to learn new things about ourselves and others; to seek and find new ways to serve. The new vision for First Church will emerge from this work of listening, hearing, experiencing and learning.

We have the blessing of stable leadership and the gift of a financial resource from the RMH sale. With these blessings comes special hope, promise and responsibility to co-create the world we want our grandchildren and future generations to inherit. It means having both heart and mind open to possibilities, imagined and not yet conceived.

As Christians, we seek to say, “Jesus’ life and ministry lives within me” in prayer that it is so. We recognize that God has no hands but ours. The traditional mainline Protestant way of bringing that message has not been working. We must learn how to be Apostles in our time, the same way the earliest Christians were Apostles in their time. Of necessity, they were both organic and continually changing. We pray this process will have similar effect on us, and to a similar end.

What is the budget and how will you spend it?

The Visioning Team requested \$15,000 primarily to fund expert facilitation and assistance which will be provided by Rev. Dr. Claire Bamberg, a proud Vermonter. The Team will work with, and are accountable to the Trustees and the congregation for the judicious use of these funds. The Team will provide comprehensive reports to the Trustees every six months, and communicate with the congregation monthly.

Is Church history important to the visioning process?

Yes! Ironically, what we learn from history often shows us a way forward which was previously unimaginable.

Through our Judeo-Christian roots we learn to be open to concept of being Apostles, and we learn what that will ask of us.

Through studying the history of our country, we come to understand injustices and missed opportunities that have led to much of the turbulence that is happening in the world today. Looking at our local history helps us understand more clearly how the marginalized and disenfranchised have come to be that way.

When looking at the history of our church, we see similar ~ maybe additional ~ pain points: the missed opportunities and acquiescence to societal “norms” that made us blind to pain and injustice that may have been happening around us/them.

To understate a truth: one cannot “fix” towards a better future for all without understanding the harsh impact of the decisions of the past. As one Team member put it, “We have truths to face about our past in order to fully embrace/envision the better future.”

When we are done and rolling forward, how will we know we are succeeding?

We will measure both involvement and impact by asking:
Do we have an ever-widening, diverse and engaged group of people working collaboratively on articulated initiatives?

Are we making a real, positive difference in individual lives and in the community around us?

We will test to see if our intent is being carried out with impact. We will listen to see if “our story” can be articulated and shared by young and old, the story we intend to be telling by the way we are serving in the world. We will know we are succeeding if community members are able to describe the heart of this congregation, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, as reflected in this vision we are about to discover together.