

CONGREGATIONAL VISION MEETINGS

First Congregational Church of Burlington, UCC

2021

Question #4

**What do you think it will take to get from
where we are today to your vision of our future?**

Quotes:

I think it will take courage and a certain amount of risk into the unfamiliar, trying things that are outside the norm...it will take creativity beyond...researching what other churches do, and let's copy that -like true creativity and true -...involving the very people that change would impact -..your wider community, to really seek out what people would be interested in - not just attract them, but serve in all ways - then creating opportunities, programs and events, around that - in order to build something that everybody feels equal and fully invested and excited about...Who we do hire-and what they are in charge of-and making sure that the few people that we do hire and put in these positions-that they have the time and space to do this creative work, not just the kind of "surviving and maintaining what has always been done" work because that can eat up a lot of time and energy.

It's really up to younger people with new and different ideas and more energy to start taking on some of that and I'm willing to help out-give advice and support-and participate -but I fell like I have kind of done my leadership. We do have to hire some staff whose responsible to be that leadership and that energy...

If there is a way for us to get some of the University of Vermont younger people involved...but they are not going to listen to somebody who looks like me. We need somebody younger making that kind of contact...whether it is a paid position...

I recognize that we are in a cultural moment where church is going out of fashion. And I also recognize that people are searching for the sacred - they are really diverse - and people's experience of the sacred is really diverse, so there are challenges to building a community of faith...spectacular worship experiences, ... associated programs, the physical environment, ...having things that feel settled and joyful... that there can be a spirit that is infectious,.. inviting...

Every once in a while we have someone come through the back door who is a new person. I think it is exceptionally important that we take note of that person and make an effort to go greet them... We are in the center of Burlington and somehow that could or should play a role in what the future looks like...we take our young people and adults outside of Burlington and outside Vermont to do service and there's a lot more we could be doing right here, or inviting other people to come in and work with us in this city...seems like that could be part of what could get us to where we want to be in five years.

Well, I think the work of having these conversations is a very good step.

Set your goals, focus on getting that goal done, and get it done before you start the next one, and if we start another three goals, just get one done before you move on to the next one.

You know, as a spiritual community we have a lot of diverse voices, and ...it makes sense to play to that strength.

Spreading the word, praying and advocating.

I think our church is doing a pretty awesome job of connecting with its members and I think that has to continue.

Gatherings... open forums and discussions where people could come into the church and maybe not have a "religious discussion", but something open to the community: a discussion about racism and how to fight it in your .. city or town, or how to help with poverty or the homeless crisis...open discussions that community members are invited to...

It is going to take the leadership of many, not one...people coming together and agreeing not to put their own wishes at the forefront..a group of people who have all different areas in mind.

A youth minister and at the college level, too...making the ...young college people feel comfortable... and have a connection between this church and that university....

Have everyone invite a friend...get them engaged in whatever program interests them.

Keep Elissa here... for a lot of people the sermon is the draw...Communication and meeting people where they are...

Faithfulness is not rooted in numbers...People all over Burlington coming together in an initiative...and not replicating what we have done in the past because that is no longer working.

In some ways I just want to turn Hannah loose! I can't wait to see what she does..she's fantastic, and really creating dynamic opportunities for children and youth and young families and meeting them where they are...I just talk about going to church. I have ended up in a number of really important conversations at work...some folks end up showing up...I think they are relieved and pleasantly surprised when someone is actually talking about how they have a church life...I think we are in a volatile social time right now. I am trying to be really cautious ... and to really listen across differences..My vision? Being very humble about what I believe and what I think is best for others...focusing more on how I live my life than what someone else needs to work on.

Sermon react: a room of people who have listened to the sermon, or not. They talk about what they have heard and take it somewhere...a forum for taking up things in the sermon.

Respecting other's faith and regions and a way to worship respectfully...invitations to get people through the doors to reach different people...change can come

We go out into the community...I want to help our greater community....

Hiring younger people...being engaged in the community and offering child care.

The people connection.

We are on the right track with a minister who makes me want to get out of bed and come to church. She has great sermons.

I think what we need to do is focus on the building itself. I do understand that a majority of the services we want to do are outside the walls...but we still have to take care of the structure. ...update spaces no longer used, converting space into places in the building that have accessibility for the handicapped or disabled people. We need to gain access to those spaces so we can hold events and services.

I think one of the most important things is continuing to be a safe space. Welcoming. I think it is very important

As we try to increase the diversity of the community there needs to be recognition that we would like individuals who do not have the financial means to participate in the community..

Dinner and some other things with people outside the church...

We need the leadership of the women.

I think there needs to be more cooperation between our sister churches and the community as resources get more limited.

Remote is going to become an everyday way for us to reach outside the walls of Burlington. We need to connect ourselves in other ways...there is strength in numbers...

Continuing hybrid.

Having us stand up for something is a visible and meaningful way...Being involved brings a whole fresh angle , and outlook, activity, ideas. ..Keep it fresh and it takes on new eyes, new involvement.

I am an appreciator of music and it helps to have diversity...I think there is much diversity in the congregation in terms of tastes and styles. ..It's important to incorporate them all...new energy, like a guest musician.

I think we need to grow a voice. I think the church would have to create a more welcoming environment for all people...true inclusiveness...I think its true of most people when they are being politically correct, they think they are doing the right thing..I am not even sure people are aware of the fact that they are not walking the talk they are speaking.

The church should be more relevant for all people. Small, special interests groups for support and growth.

Small group functions...continue to provide outreach

We need to stop gauging our success on how many people are in church on a Sunday morning! One or two worship services cannot be the only way we worship... Try things. Do not be afraid of failure...Need to create more opportunity and meet populations where they are and who they are - including those who do not come to church on Sunday.

We need to find ways to reach out to people on visual levels.

Honor the fact that spirituality takes many forms...there are multiple ways to develop spiritually.

Need to look at what a place of worship should be ..younger folks do not look at Sunday morning the way we do...try to find different ways to worship

We have to decide what we want to do and not be afraid to put our resources there...change...figure out how to communicate in difference ways...

Use sanctuary to host different events...reach out to folks in need in the community.

Use our venue to integrate with the community more. We do have to change to keep current, but don't have to change our focus

Existing missions punched up... Use the RM money in a wise and thoughtful way

Merge with College Street.. Core programs will be around social and racial justice...a day care program...

Investment in staff. We run a really mean, tight ship right now and it gets done...these guys are way too overworked... dynamic youth minister or youth leader...We do need to take care of this building...

Investment in our physical plant to preserve it..And also in the staffing...

We need to invite and educate ourselves of the assets, the resources that are in this community...I'm speaking of the refugees from the various ethnic groups, not wanting to build a bigger congregation, but to make us better neighbors...I think our path as a church community should focus on where the themes are in the "We Are the Church' concept.

Attention to advocacy that addresses the needs of a large/broad swath group of people.

Get out there and show people we are not a bunch of "Bible readers" - that we are doing things to benefit other people - other groups of people - and we don't need to do that because we want to attract those people, ...I don't think you go out and actively serve another group and expect to get a pat on the back and all come to church.

More public exposure and to be involved in things outside the church...

More selectively choose people..identify people with that background to be involved in specific ways...build a spiritual gifts inventory...Join forces with College Street...

Improved the outside appearance of the church..Continue to explore how we can be more effective in supporting individuals to develop and grow spiritually...Make specific out reach requests, like "we need help with X". It would make it easier to become involved and connected.

Time. ..it is a process.

Practical steps for the building... this visioning process...Graphic presentations of what changes will mean...Willingness to listen to opposing viewpoints and come to the middle somehow. May need some kind of therapy session to get us to those points. Young adult programming.

Helping the older generation understand that those entering/joining/collaborating are not trying to talk their beloved traditions away...If we are to stay alive over the next decades, we need to change.

We need to be more aware of what the conflicts are.

We need to know what the issues are.

Everyone is a little afraid of changes. I am comfortable with change, but in 3-5 years, I'd still like to recognize my church.

HS programs

Connection between individuals and the bigger picture...Volunteer forums...Let the community know of the great things we do/are doing.

Collaborate with other churches.

More community outreach, not necessarily church to church.

More interaction with church communities.

A community house things, like I see with the Jewish community.

All doing different things, according to strengths and interests.

Fellowship and community - expand that.

Increase events that the community comes to.

Not ignoring the finances and stuff, but not have that be the priority. The priority is being the church and grow the ministry.

The building: upgrades to modernize the building...expand access...Gathering events...

Expand. Parking is an issue...deal with Burlington parking garages re: a deal for Sunday mornings...tape services for community television..look at different models of how the building might be used.

Convert portions of church space to (used infrequently now) for other income-generating purposes..upgrade the kitchen to commercial grade...Increase the amount the building is used, especially at night...house a pre-school

Youth programs that serve our community here, rather than out of state or in another country.

Talk with CCTA and perhaps a Sunday bus.

Create and expand a music ministry...Change, and getting used to change.

I do think we need to be open to change and change is not so easy. Coming up with an agreement is tough. We need to have a plan that reflects change. ... do creative things with the building ...Taking risks is part of what we have been called to do as a community of faith/

It is going to take a lot of money and greater creativity to make the whole building accessible.

Sometimes we are not as welcoming as we perceive ourselves to be. We need to address that.

This is the perfect opportunity not to go back to the way we used to do things, to really think about each step. ..take some lessons from the past 18 months and then tweak some of the things we do.

“Build back better”... it is going to be a time of flux and trial and error and change and experimentation...Ideal to be doing this visioning process.

Groups to connect with sermons, one another, thoughts, ideas - small groups for further study.

Maintain our building.

Financial backing for our visions. ..Creative use of the resources we have as a downtown church to enhance community connections...accessible building.

All people talk more about what we are doing outside of church and in the community...Activities, programs that create connections,

Embrace the principles of radical hospitality...each congregant...invest time, financial resources and energy into reaching new communities..invite more POC to speak in and lead our services, offer multi-lingual programs and resources, launch a college ministry, host young adult focused gatherings (worship night, theology on tap), hosting fun, free nights in low income neighborhoods, advertising church initiatives more widely throughout the city, crafting a diverse, welcoming image through our website and social media, generally challenging the assumption that whiteness is the norm/ideal in our community.

Take a year-long hiatus to re-examine programs we “always do”. Don’t stuff the calendar with legacy things. Do some program-level experimentation. Special programming with College Street? The hiking group? Contemporary worship- maybe interfaith to start? Or a collaboration with College Street? Sponsor a city-wide speaker series on social and environmental justice? Reach out with New Alpha to Burlington’s Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Initiative to ask if we could partner on a faith-based racial justice initiative?

As a congregation, we must pray, listen more, pray and listen again...Restorative justice practices must become part of our traditions...A comprehensive self-study that includes where we are, what we have and the ways in which we influenced UVM’s early years..The context behind having both our land and our buildings, as well as why our church and another burned down and had to be rebuilt,...eugenics and how close this movement was in our community and country.. .This community history is common to our faith community, which also witnessed the evaluations of the downtown neighborhood undertaken to modernize our city only a few decades ago.

Continue to identify unjust practices...Speak truth to power. Be activists. Enlist the support of leaders in local, regional and State institutions who recognize these injustices and can direct their influence to make substantive, positive changes...Establish relationships with those who are experiencing injustice and oppression...focus on transformational as well as transactional initiatives and relationships..Become a center for turning love into action [educational resources, relational support, dialogue opportunities for all in the community] Build on what works and has become self-sustainable. Add psychiatric care, more legal clinics, access to more personal hygiene facilities. Create relationships with our youth. Find more ways to include the elderly. Take 'open and affirming' to the next level. Explore ways to strengthen our collaboration with local faith communities. Be open to new creative worship and music possibilities. [redesign worship space?]

Congregation approves a consensus vision statement, based on gleanings from these conversations, having conversations to be sure congregation is on board with that statement and then at our annual meeting, vote on that statement...Establish task force to track progress on that vision statement...translate vision statement into a strategic plan...Congregation members commit to an action or element of the plan..allocation of funds,..using the annual meeting each year to celebrate progress and monitor and adjust strategic plan as needed.

Successfully complete the visioning process...synthesize a vision statement that congregation adopts...develop concrete steps to implement the vision (defining programs of church we want to keep, new ones to be developed.) Defining how we want to engage and live in our community in terms of action...decide how to integrate the funds from the sale of the Ronald McDonald House into our congregational life in a way that does not undermine the commitment of our members to support our life together...Be a place where people of limited means feel welcome and participate (greater mix of music, - particularly music that is joyfully celebratory)..Develop small group gatherings that create opportunities for people to gather around shared interests...intergenerational meetings...Improve the warmth of our worship space. Make it possible for people to see one another...Create more open space in which things can happen (sacred dancing, ..) More worship experiences in the native language of folks whose first/most comfortable language is not English. Reach out to documented and undocumented immigrants. Reach out to non-profit, non-professional community organizations that need free or inexpensive space. The goal is service and to fill the church with life.

Intentionally plan small group, personal interactions...Continued Zoom presence intentionally putting together small groups (Let's Zoom in", with names at the bottom of each screen - helping folks to learn each other's names)..More regularly planned adult education groups (6-7) who regularly show for Bible study, or another educational discussion program (expanding horizons)...More intentional attempts at programming intergenerational interactions...More planned smaller social interactions like "Faithful Friday" programs - social time and brief, relevant message.

Variety of opportunities for service/connection to those in need in our community..Better serving/holding space for homeless in our church space...More ways for parents to be both support and able to connect with other parents (small groups/supper clubs)...different types of worship and different music..more engagement and inclusion of new American congregants' voices in planning/decision making...reach out and engagement of BLPOC

Expand/improve use of physical space (access) with goal of increased use for all...better understand city permitting, etc.... Work with architects/landscape dissing to start to visualize possible transformations...low cost testing of best ideas....

Dollars to continue to be an active Christian presence in our community...Welcome all, give them a role to play...Continue to be a place of music...More services and programs with College Street...Work together to FCCB will be a place when they seek a site for community gatherings, a preschool place, and leadership activity to address problems of human needs here and abroad.

Improved outreach. Making sure we are doing the best for those we help-in both short term and long term - do it the right way - not hurting where we intend to help. Understand the reasons people might want to be involved with our church...Making ourselves relevant. We are known in Burlington for our Outreach. After reading Toxic Charity I have questions about some of the things we do - or the way it is done. Having the church read and discuss this type of book so we chart a "right path" for doing the best outreach that we can. Partnering with other organizations in the community.

Focus on becoming outwardly focused and commit to radical hospitality.

Support new ideas!..Books study. Live into the words we say when we say we are open and affirming - all of us. Book groups...Learn how to reach people in different stages in their lives..Keep virtual church..address generational observations... get our message out as the world changes...use the website to give a better impression of who we are...

Contributions of time and money.