

**FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SIMSBURY**  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**June 7, 2012**

**PROPOSED VISION STATEMENT:**

***“Following Christ, Building Community, Changing Lives”***

**Strategic Goals**

**Executive Summary:**

Our research and deliberations have concluded that the strategic direction of First Church must focus on:

**THE FIVE PILLARS:**

1. ***NURTURE DISCIPLES: HELP PARTICIPANTS TO EXPLORE, DEEPEN AND PRACTICE THEIR FAITH***
2. ***INVITE OTHERS: GROW FIRST CHURCH BY REACHING OUT INTO OUR SURROUNDING COMMUNITY***
3. ***TARGETED MINISTRIES: RESPOND TO THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF OUR CONGREGATION AND OUR COMMUNITY***
4. ***FOSTER GENEROSITY: DEEPEN OUR COMMITMENT TO FAITHFUL GIVING***
5. ***EMPHASIZE MISSION: PUT OUR FAITH INTO ACTION BY PURSUING THE WELLBEING OF ALL GOD’S PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL EMPHASIS TO THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY***

**THE FOUNDATION LAYERS:**

- A. ***REVISE GOVERNANCE: DEVELOP A MORE FLEXIBLE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE THAT PROMOTES MINISTRY VITALITY***
- B. ***REFINE STAFFING: RESPOND TO EVOLVING MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND PROGRAM SUPPORT NEEDS TO MEET MINISTRY GOALS***
- C. ***INITIATE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN: TO ADDRESS THE MAINTENANCE NEEDS OF OUR FACILITY, POSSIBLE PLANT IMPROVEMENTS, AND COMMUNITY MISSION INITIATIVE***

## PILLARS

### **I. *NURTURE DISCIPLES: HELP PARTICIPANTS TO EXPLORE, DEEPEN AND PRACTICE THEIR FAITH***

**Goal:** To develop opportunities for members and friends to *EXPLORE* and *DEEPEN* their faith by *INTEGRATING* faith formation into *ALL ASPECTS OF OUR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE* and *DISCOVERING* ways all can *LIVE OUT FAITH* in *DAILY LIFE*

#### **Current Assessment:**

We are a congregation that often finds it difficult to express and articulate our faith and many of us view our faith as something very personal and private. Though we function from a foundation of faith, we are sometimes reluctant to reflect upon how our faith is calling us to work together as a congregation to witness to God's calling in the world. We often view ourselves as receivers of faith-based programs, rather than active participants. Additionally, younger generations are seeking to develop and explore their faith in ways that are different from the older generations. They desire more experiential and diverse forms of worship, as well as, opportunities for hands-on, relationship-based mission. They are also feeling increasingly ill-equipped to deal with the spiritual and emotional needs of their children and teens.

#### **Equipping Required:**

- The worship and faith formational needs of the congregation, including the varying expectations of the different demographic groups, will be assessed to make our worship as vital as possible.
- CE Director and clergy will provide the training, guidance and support of the new Ministry to Parents.
- Director of Christian Education and Clergy will provide support for the new ministries targeted toward parents of children and teens.

#### **Process:**

- Develop a plan for our renewed Music Ministries by the fall of 2012.
- Support the newly forming Women's and Men's Ministry Small Groups that have begun.
- Develop a new Young Parents and Parents of Teens ministries
- Integrate Small Group Faith-formation into all aspects of congregational life.
- Research and assessment of other churches' Faith-formation and Small Group Ministries.

#### **Resources Needed**

- Clergy time will be needed to train the small group facilitators and to help incorporate Small Group Ministries into the life of the church.
- Communication via a variety of media, including, but not limited to the church website, social media and blogs.

#### **Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- Vibrant worship services that feeds and inspires worshippers to live out their faith in their daily lives as evidenced by increased participation in and outside of worship.
- Expanded Opportunities for lay folk to participate in worship.
- Music ministries that invite, cultivate & incorporate a broad range of talent in worship
- The congregation will begin to identify themselves as active, faithful participants in the life of the church.
- Develop new ministry programs for parents of young children and teens that help empower them to better nurture the spiritual and emotional growth of their children.
- Move the majority of the congregation from being receivers of programs toward seeing themselves as active participation in the faith and life of the church.

## **II. *INVITE OTHERS: GROW FIRST CHURCH BY REACHING OUT INTO OUR SURROUNDING COMMUNITY***

**Goal:** To develop a *CULTURE* of *INVITATION*, encouraging and *EQUIPPING* members and friends to invite *NEIGHBORS* and creating more *DOORWAYS* into the life of the Congregation

### **Current Assessment:**

It is a well-recognized fact that worship attendance is a primary indicator of the health of a congregation. First Church is currently on a decline in terms of worship attendance and membership numerical growth. Within the community, First Church is seen as an architectural landmark and for some (who don't know us) see it as a "fortress" that feels unapproachable. Only 9% of the population in the New England area regularly attends worship so the "mission field" is enormous. Studies have shown that active and vital worship, with a welcoming and inviting congregation, are pre-requisites for growth. It has been found that 87% of people who join a church do so because friends or family members invited them. Our Welcome Church Ministry team has been working hard to help us become a more inviting and embracing congregation.

First Church was quite literally the church that the town grew up around. Our impact on the community has been significant over the years. Due to the growing needs of our community we need to devote more time and resources to addressing the concerns of our town and surrounding area. We also have a faithful voice that needs to be heard in an increasingly ridge view of Christianity as held by the too many in this country.

### **Equipping Needed:**

- Education congregants about the importance of pastoral presence in the larger community.
- Inform the congregation about evolving contemporary growth strategies and methods of adapting to the changing landscape of the mission field.
- Teach the congregation to invite those without a church into small, invitational events, creating doorways into the life of the church.
- Enhanced communication through local media and a more inviting and intuitive Website designed for members and visitors.

### **Process:**

- Evaluate our worship and ministry offerings as to when people are most inclined to attend.
- Free up 10% of the Pastoral staff's time to network in the community.
- Create a culture of "invitation," where congregants invite friends, family, neighbors and those without a church home, into small, invitational events - creating doorways into the life of the church.
- Add to our present Welcoming Church team a new Growth and Renewal Ministry team that would intentionally extend our welcome and presence into the community.
- Greater use of marketing and media - new website and use of a variety of social networking media.
- Offer town-wide events and programs that bring people to our doors and generate a sense that we are a vital resource for our community.
- Look for ways to extend the reach of our faith voice that more may know of our views on Christianity.

### **Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- Worship services will be continually evaluated and enhanced to meet the changing needs of our worshippers.
- Our Music Ministries program will develop a vision for the future that incorporates renewal and growth and the desires of both present worshippers and future.
- Pastor's job descriptions would be re-written to include networking goals with a new emphasis on evangelism.
- The congregation will develop a "culture of invitation" and regularly invite others with similar goals.

- Our Open and Affirming process continues with possible conclusion and vote by 2013.
- Town wide Programs like “Honoring our Women of the Military Past and Present”
- First Church’s music program is recognized within the congregation and the community as a beacon of invitation and a source of spiritual inspiration
- First Church members routinely “tell our story” to friends and through use of local communication
- We will have a brand new, attractive, and interactive website by 2013.

### **III. *TARGETED MINISTRIES: RESPOND TO THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF OUR CONGREGATION AND OUR COMMUNITY***

**Goal:** To bring faithful ministries to the *INFREQUENTLY ENGAGED* members of our church and the *UNDERSERVED* populations of our community

**Current Assessment:**

Through research, the Strategic Planning Committee identified single adults and seniors as the fastest growing demographics in our larger community. Few ministries or programs are available to Single Adults in the Farmington Valley. Additionally, though we offer important social gatherings to our seniors, (Supper Club, Men’s Retired Luncheon, etc.), we need to offer specific targeted ministries to address the spiritual needs of our seniors, who are experiencing a variety of life changes. Furthermore, we are committed to assessing the spiritual needs of our families and how we might help them.

**Equipping Needed:**

- Develop a ministry team for each demographic to prayerfully discern the unique needs and explore how to enhance the present programming and to develop new and faith-filled offerings.
- Provide pastoral leadership for these new ministries and development and guidance for lay leaders within the ministry teams.
- Clergy responsible for the development of each ministry will be identified.
- Marketing and communication of the new and enhanced ministries to the congregation and the wider community.

**Process:**

- Develop a plan to roll out a variety of targeted programs over the next two years.
- Create ministry teams to work on ways to initiate and implement these targeted ministries
- Develop and enhance a ministry for our senior members.
- Develop a new ministry for Single adults.
- Enhance the Young Family and Family with Teens Ministries through active programing.

**Possible Desired Outcome over Time:**

- A culture of hospitality and invitation within our ministries so that members of the larger community will feel welcomed and excited about our offerings.

#### **IV. FOSTER GENEROSITY: DEEPEN OUR COMMITMENT TO FAITHFUL GIVING**

**Goal:** To cultivate a culture of **GENEROSITY** through regular emphasis on giving as a way to **PRACTICE** faith and express **GRATITUDE** to God

##### **Current Assessment:**

Today, there are 1.3 million non-profits in this country and many of them are highly skilled at asking people for money. Research indicates that churches receive less than 1/3 of all charitable gifts. Within many congregations, there is a disconnect between the purpose and vision of the church and the reasons in which people pledge to the Stewardship campaign. Focused events, unrelated to pledging often yields significant donations.

##### **Equipping Needed:**

- Opportunities for the Congregation to understand and develop a culture of generosity, in which connections are made between faithful giving and effective ministry.
- Congregational small group study that focuses on generosity, narrative story telling, and articulation of our call to faith.

##### **Process:**

- The Stewardship Ministry team will study, assess and implement a new and customized Stewardship plan.
- Incorporate the Culture of Generosity theme into our worship and ministries on a regular basis.
- Offer regular presentations and seminars, to the congregation and the wider community, on personal finances, investments, planning, etc.
- Assessment of congregational time and talent that would better enable the creation of targeted ministries.
- A spirit of gratitude by routinely “telling their stories” to highlight ways that First Church has made a difference in their lives and faith
- Development of a gift assessment tool to help members discover and use their gifts

##### **Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- The congregation will have a well-developed year-round discipleship and stewardship process that will incorporate a customized and intentional approach for pledges.
- A ministry will be developed that provides both financial and stewardship education programs geared for individual congregants and the congregation as a whole.
- Measureable growth in faithful giving over time

**V. *EMPHASIZE MISSION: PUT OUR FAITH INTO ACTION BY PURSUING THE WELLBEING OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL EMPHASIS TO THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY***

**Goal:** To sustain and build on this congregation's historic **COMMITMENT** to mission and outreach **SERVING WITH AND LEARNING FROM** those in need with in our **LOCAL** community, **NATION** and the **WORLD**

**Current Assessment:**

First Church has been a very generous church for over 50 years and one of the largest contributors to Our Church's Wider Mission of the United Church of Christ. Many churches, our congregation included, have had to re-examine their mission giving during these challenging times. In spite of this unfortunate reality, we continue to remain in the top tier of all CT UCC Churches when it comes to our OCWM giving. We are also able to raise significant monies on a regular basis for worthy causes or special outreach projects. For example, in the month of May 2011 we raised \$20,000 for three special mission projects. The congregation has expressed a strong desire for local hands-on missions.

**Equipping Needed:**

- The Mission and Outreach Ministry team will regularly educate the Congregation on the benefits of their efforts and the benefits of Our Church's wider Mission.
- The Clergy will provide preaching and teaching that focus on connecting our faith with our call to be servants in mission.

**Process:**

- The Chair of the Stewardship Ministry team, in conjunction with our ministers and members of our Congregation, will champion other mission giving opportunities at First Church.
- Recordkeeping practices will be modified to capture and report mission giving from additional mission activities that are outside of the designated budgeting process.
- Encourage the Executive Council to consider using the Sexton house, when it is available, to be used as the focal point for a new specialized community outreach.

**Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- 10% of all annual income at First Church to mission and outreach this will be viewed as a minimum.
- Increased membership participation in hands-on ministries.
- Lay initiation of mission and outreach projects.
- Larger scale, local and "high impact" mission projects or initiatives that excite and engage our congregation
- Creative use of the home on our campus so that it might provide a new and much needed ministry of outreach to our community

## **FOUNDATION LAYERS**

### **A. *REVISE GOVERNANCE: DEVELOP A MORE FLEXIBLE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE THAT PROMOTES MINISTRY VITALITY***

**Goal:** To *RESEARCH* multiple models and *DEVELOP* and *IMPLEMENT* a structure that *STREAMLINES DECISION MAKING, REDUCES TIME AND ENERGY* spent on “running the church” and *EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES* for all to participate in *MEANINGFUL MINISTRIES*

#### **Current Assessment:**

Most churches today that have a 1950’s style governance organization and are struggling to fill their boards and committees that are needed to run the church. Many studies and practice have shown that today’s congregants are less willing to serve on a board or committee because they have limited time and less interest in running an institution. Conversely, there is an increased level of interest in using one’s gifts for new and creative ministries. Many churches of all denominations are examining their present structure with an eye at changing it to be more responsive to today’s cultural changes. The First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, Illinois, South Church of Glastonbury, and The Village Church in Wellesley, MA (all about our size) have created and implemented ministry governance model with good success.

#### **Equipping Needed:**

- Participate in the Farmington Valley Governance Seminar in the fall of 2012 to help guide us in our process.
- Support the Governance Team that is presently in place and doing its research and reflection with a goal of providing a possible new model to try by the beginning of 2013.
- Have the Executive Council read the book, Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership by Dan Hotchkiss, to help familiarize our leaders with the concepts and the rationale that will be presented by the Governance team.
- Offer a gifts assessment seminar that will allow individuals to explore what gifts and interests in ministry they may have and want to utilize.

#### **Process:**

- Appointment of a Governance Task Force by the Executive Council that will research and explore the options and steps needed to transform our governance structure.
- Presentation of the proposed model to the Council by in early 2013.
- Members will be encouraged to discover and develop their gifts and create ministries that are reflective of their gifts and interest. (Current examples of this process include our new Small Group Women’s Ministries, our Greeting Card and Prayer Shawl Ministries, the Care Bag and numerous other mission related ministries.)

#### **Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- A flatter organizational structure will reduce bureaucracy and committee overlap while encouraging the development and launch of new ministries.
- A streamlined decision making process.
- Fewer perceived barriers of the old model, thus leading to new vitality and growth within the church
- The Executive Council functions as a visioning committee of the church

**B. *REFINE STAFFING: RESPOND TO EVOLVING MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND PROGRAM SUPPORT NEEDS TO MEET MINISTRY GOALS***

**Goals:** To establish the right **ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN** (structure, staff and capabilities) to meet the **CHANGING** management, administrative and program support and ministry needs of First Church

**Current Assessment:**

The professional and staff needs of our ministry are ever changing and in need of constant assessment. The church has decided to put on hold our three full-time minister model due to budget constants. Presently, we have a search committee searching for a new half-time Acting Associate Minister with the hope of having that person on board by fall of 2012. We have recently become a site available for Teaching Parish Interns from Yale and Andover Newton Divinity Schools. We have also done an office study of the staffing needs of our church office, which has led to the hiring of a new full-time Administrator. We have also hired a new Facilities manager and new cleaning service to address the needs of our building.

**Process:**

- Professional Staff and Clergy will require an assessment and possible revision of job descriptions to better reflect our strategic goals.
- More clearly defined job descriptions, goals, and objectives for each Minister, proper administrative support, and well-defined roles and responsibilities will help us extend this reach.
- Our new Church Office Administrator will evaluate the efficiency and staffing of our office

**Possible Desired Outcomes over Time:**

- A team of Ministers and professionals that will provide continued training of our laity to help our congregation be more active and fulfilled in our respective ministries.
- Effective management of the business operation of First Church facilities, and the staffing of the Church Office.

**C. *INITIATE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN: TO ADDRESS THE MAINTENANCE NEEDS OF OUR FACILITY, POSSIBLE PLANT IMPROVEMENTS, AND COMMUNITY MISSION INITIATIVE***

**Goal:** To provide the **NECESSARY MAINTENANCE** of our middle aged building with an eye toward **POSSIBLE ENHANCEMENTS** that may be required to help us **ATTAIN OUR MINISTRY GOALS**

**Current Assessment:**

Our buildings are getting older and are in need of attention. Plus the ministry needs of our congregation are ever changing and so we should look at ways to address both with a Capital Campaign.

**Process:**

- Establish a Capital Campaign Committee by fall of 2012 to begin the process of assessing needs and establishing goals.
- Continue to pursue outside funding sources like the Historic District Grants and others
- Begin the campaign as soon as possible.

**Possible Desired Outcome over Time:**

- A beautifully renovated facility that is better able to support the ministry goals of this church.