

# Rockville United Church Strategic Plan (2021 – 2026)

## Grow the Circle Wide:



## Faith in Action

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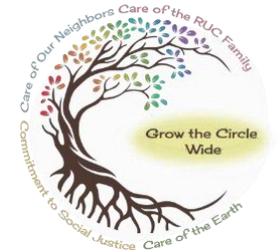
O God,  
who has called us Your servants  
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
by paths as yet untrodden  
and through perils unknown:  
Give us faith to go out with good courage,  
Not knowing where we go,  
but only that Your hand is leading us  
and Your love supporting us. Amen  
*Lutheran Book of Worship*

# Summary

The RUC Task Force studied the data from the visioning process, reviewed the summary prepared by the UCC consultant and interviewed stakeholders. Input also was provided from six congregation roundtable discussions. From these sources, we developed the following four Mission Priorities with multiple goals for each.

## 1. Care of the RUC Family

- Goal 1: Continue virtual/remote technology
- Goal 2: Continue/enhance small groups
- Goal 3: Enhance pastoral/congregational care
- Goal 4: Reach out and support the transgender community



## 2. Care of Our Neighbors

- Goal 1: Enhance Relationship with Community Reach
- Goal 2: Increase community use of RUC campus & community engagement



## 3. Commitment to Social Justice

- Goal 1: Develop social justice involvement.
- Goal 2: Align RUC Leadership structure with social justice priorities
- Goal 3: Strengthen connections with other social justice groups
- Goal 4: Reflect justice priorities in buildings and grounds



## 4. Care of the Earth

- Goal 1: Make structural changes to integrate the Care of the Earth perspective throughout our congregation and into the community
- Goal 2: Be the green church in practice
- Goal 3: Be the green church through outreach



## Strategic Use of Buildings and Grounds

Renovations to church building and grounds will enhance and evolve current facility and property. Proposed projects also allow the RUC campus to be a vehicle to live into the RUC vision and values, supporting our spiritual practice, experience, and expression.

- Build an accessible, intergenerational interactive art and play center (playground)
- Create an outside fellowship space
- Enhance the memorial garden
- Renovate kitchen
- Improve accessibility and Flexibility of our building
- Make our parking lot an outreach to the community and statement of our values

## Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF)

Elizabeth Cooper-Martin, Jed Johnson (co-chair), Laurie Kawa, Jennifer Knutsen, Joni Miller (co-chair), Beth Pattison, Jeff Pattison, and Scott Winnette.

### Overview

The Task Force prayerfully studied the data from the visioning process; reviewed the summary prepared by our UCC consultant, Jill White; and interviewed stakeholders. We listened to our congregation by facilitating six Sunday after-worship roundtable conversations:

- LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning)
- Strategic Use of Building and Grounds
- Care of the RUC Family
- Care of Our Neighbors
- Commitment to Social Justice
- Care of the Earth

Unlike many churches' strategic planning initiatives, increasing our membership has not been a goal. As we focus on social justice and care of our neighbors and the earth, we attract people also interested in those initiatives, some of whom may have been turned off by other religious institutions. We draw in people through our authenticity. We are a community that cares for each other, cares for others outside our walls, and opens our arms ever wider to those who are struggling and to those who may feel left out. The more we are true to our core values; the more we attract those who are like us and attract people who need our care and commitment to them. Expanding our RUC family can be and will be a result of achieving our mission priorities as well as our focus on making our building accessible and our programs accessible online. We are known through our actions. We do not just put up a banner. Our buildings and grounds serve as a visible representation of our values. We mean the words and we live the words.

The SPTF is inspired by the song, *Draw the Circle Wide*, by Gordon White, and have adapted it changing the title to *Grow the Circle Wide*.

**Refrain:** *Grow the circle wide, grow it wider still.*

*Let this be our song: no one stands alone.*

*Standing side by side, grow the circle, grow the circle wide...*

As you go through this document, vision answers **why**.  
Goal answers **what** we do. Initiative answers **how** we do it.



## Mission Priority #1: Care of the RUC Family

### Vision

While being tended to and nurtured, Rockville United Church is a place to grow in understanding and faith. We are a support system of love and care, fellowship and laughter, compassion, and commitment to our siblings in faith. We have opportunities to worship, to contribute to the daily life of RUC, as well as opportunities to share gifts and talents with each other and the greater community.

### Goal #1: Continue Virtual/Remote Technology

Forced to close our physical doors in March 2020, RUC transitioned to an all-virtual platform. We quickly started using Zoom for our worship services, committee meetings, and group activities. There were some glitches, but we learned as we went along. As we improved our use of technology, we also learned there were some unexpected benefits to the change.

People, who could/would not drive at night and would not have participated in meetings or groups, were now able to experience this aspect of RUC. People who had moved to other parts of the country joined us in worship. During our communal sharing of our joys and sorrows during worship, people shared real-time updates from their hospital beds, as they were sitting with someone in hospice, and as they were traveling. There was a surprising intimacy in seeing people's faces as they shared communion or led the prayer. As we return to the building, people participating in the visioning event want to maintain these benefits of technology.

Knowing we would want to return to a Hybrid Church, RUC has already received \$3,300 tech grant from Presbytery, installed cameras and other equipment, and approved an additional 5 hours/week of administrator time to handle worship technology.

All aspects of church life will need to be assessed post-COVID: greeters, fellowship, potlucks. As we find and address issues, we will need to have an ongoing conversation with experts and each other.



Dual formats will require changes to how some things were done in-person in the past. Some meetings may be hybrid; some may be virtual; and some may be in-person. Remaining committed to dual formats will require flexibility and innovation.

**Care of the RUC Family, Goal #1: Continue virtual/remote technology.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Implement technology,**
- **Test and implement hybrid worship,**
- **Determine appropriate meeting and event formats.**

**Goal #2: Continue/Enhance Small Groups.**

With small groups and all-church activities, we foster relationships and growth and create connections. Activities went on-line in March 2020, starting with the successful series “Wednesdays at 7,” an online program or discussion nearly every week for over a year. We also did small groups with a Lenten study of the book *Boundless Compassion*. These successes have led to explorations of how to do other, larger events virtually and how to begin hosting hybrid events when we are able to reopen.

As we continue to plan small groups, we recognize that group size matters. The type of group also impacts group size. Any group that is designed for sharing must be small or someone will be left out. To foster an environment that encourages the creation of small groups, both planned and organic, we also must foster an environment that allows for groups to be closed at a certain size. This chaffs against our ethic of inclusivity but is necessary for the depth and power of participant experience.



**Care of the RUC Family, Goal #2: Continue/enhance small groups.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Create a system for small groups ministry,**
- **Pilot process for small study groups.**

### Goal #3: Enhance Pastoral/Congregational Care.

We foster self-care and care for each other from the individual to the congregational level. We seek to provide care that reflects the unique values, talents, and needs of RUC.

The comments from the visioning process about this area were vague: “strengthen congregational care” and “have more pastoral care.” To understand what the congregants mean by these comments, we propose to do a needs assessment of the congregations. Questions such as the following can be included:

- What do congregants expect in times of crisis, health issues/surgery, times of grief, “normal” times?
- What do congregants expect from pastors? What care could be delivered by laity (e.g., Board of Deacons or other trained lay ministers such as Stephen ministers)?
- What needs might RUC’s activities and volunteers have?

We are developing a weekly intercessory prayer group process. We also support current Congregational Care initiatives for children, for those with deaths in their families, and for individuals in transition or crisis; and to stay in touch with a subset of the whole congregation.

### Love Ourselves in Community

Allow self-care to be more than acceptable, to become a priority. Self-care empowers, encourages, re-energizes, and nurtures. We can avoid mission burn-out through self-care and care for each other. We are exploring the role of coordinator for volunteers proposed in Care for our Neighbors to include all kinds of congregant engagement.



**Care of the RUC Family, Goal #3: Enhance pastoral/congregational care.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Plan needs assessment,**
- **Conduct needs assessment,**
- **Implement needs assessment recommendations,**
- **Plan and implement intercessory prayer group.**

Wednesdays at **7**

#### **Goal #4: Reach Out and Support Transgender Community**

Since 2001, when our congregation voted to be a More Light Presbyterian and UCC Open and Affirming congregation, RUC has been intentional and proactive with our welcoming of and integrating our fellow LGBTQ siblings into our RUC family. At the county, state, and national levels, our 100+- member LGBTQ Outreach Group has advocated actively for marriage equality and other rights. Currently we focus on the transgender community, including creating an all-gender restroom. Again, through the visioning process, the congregation has reiterated RUC's commitment to the LGBTQ community. Our intention is to enhance and evolve our current advocacy and support of the LGBTQ community and to open our arms ever wider in sharing our love to the community.



#### **Care of the RUC Family, Goal #4: Reach out and support the transgender community.**

##### **Initiatives:**

- **Further our own congregational understanding & awareness.**
- **Provide growing welcome of LGBTQ community.**
- **Offer safe spaces for LGBTQ community.**
- **Write preferred pronouns on nametags and Zoom names.**
- **Use written and spoken language in liturgy, website, and elsewhere that is non-binary gender neutral.**



## Mission Priority #2: Care of Our Neighbors

### Vision

Rockville United Church (RUC) is a compassionate, mission-oriented congregation where life is celebrated through worship and programs. As the hands and feet of Jesus, we put our faith into action as we strive to serve our neighbors.

To further our key mission priorities, we seek to foster collaboration and share our time, talents, and treasures in partnerships. We respond to the specific needs of the Twinbrook/Rockville/Montgomery County community.

### Goal #1: Enhance Relationship with Community Reach

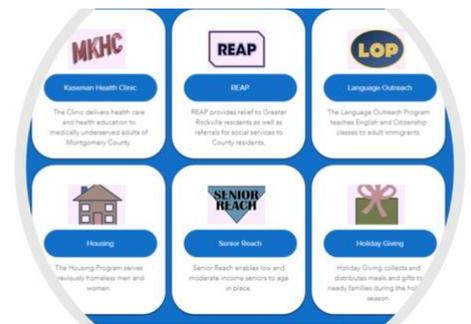
Build upon Rockville United Church's 50+ year foundational relationship with Community Reach of Montgomery County (CR). This relationship will help CR to further their mission "to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable of Montgomery County residents by providing them with basic health and human services and advocating on their behalf, with the goal of helping them achieve and maintain self-sufficiency."

Initiate new synergistic partnerships such as:

- Create environmental team to support Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) recipients to make their homes more energy efficient, buy healthier foods, or participate in gardening,
- Collaborate to enhance Community Reach's capacity to better serve and support LGBTQ community.

Continue to tell the Community Reach story, inviting RUC membership and others into that narrative. The goal is to increase awareness of and engagement in CR volunteer efforts including current RUC mission efforts (Language Outreach Program, COVID testing, Jefferson and Rockland Houses).

Explore volunteer-led annual fundraising event to provide additional essential unrestricted financial support and promote fellowship through service.



**Care of Our Neighbors, Goal #1: Enhance Relationship with Community Reach.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Initiate new synergistic partnership(s) with Community Reach (CR),**
- **Provide education/training, as appropriate, for CR staff/volunteers (e.g., LGBTQ),**
- **Tell Community Reach story routinely (new member orientation, solicit for CR volunteer opportunities),**
- **Explore volunteer-led annual fundraising event to provide essential unrestricted financial support to CR,**
- **Support Community Reach in naming an RUC LGBTQ member to the Community Reach Board.**



**Goal #2: Increase Community Use of RUC Campus & Community Engagement.**

Increased community use of RUC campus as a vehicle and focal point to support our neighbors/neighborhood through initiatives and activities is in alignment with mission priorities. These efforts embrace RUC’s decades-long leadership and passion for local community ministry and the LGBTQ community.

Review existing community needs assessments and other resources to identify and initiate meaningful mission efforts.

Consider outreach and ecumenical supports (e.g., immigrant rights, ESL, rights with law enforcement) for the local Latinx community who make up over 33% of the Twinbrook community.

Explore partnerships with local progressive churches, interfaith connections including non-Christian communities or other neighborhood entities:

- Living Faith Food Pantry,
- MoCo LGBTQ Youth Forum,
- Rainbow Place,
- Twinbrook Citizens Association

<https://www.twinbrookcommunity.org/>.



Ensure Rockville United Church has the ongoing capacity to nurture and support Care of our Neighbors. Explore our staffing model to consider volunteer coordinator role/responsibilities.

Explore supplemental technologies that support engagement (skills and needs tracking, etc.).

Continue to explore the feasibility of creating and/or supporting a drop-in center and/or transitional house for teenagers and young adults. Despite our initial research, we are not aware of any public study that assesses the needs of Montgomery County youth – let alone LGBTQ youth. In our exploration, we have learned there is NO youth shelter in the county; youth experiencing homelessness must go to a hotel or adult shelter (average age of men’s shelter residents: 45-55), live on the street, or couch surf. Besides housing needs, we learned of the immense needs of Montgomery County youth for emergency assistance, food, clothing, counseling, GED preparation, etc. There is NO Montgomery County health clinic where LGBTQ youth can obtain hormones and HIV/AIDS meds. As a first step, RUC may have to initiate a needs assessment study before we determine where we will focus our time, energy, and resources.



As we further assess the needs of county youth and discover the inadequacies of services, we can count as a positive factor that the RUC facility is located near public transportation and Rockville High School. Also, counting in our favor is RUC’s long involvement in community ministry. We have had over 50 years of practice in outreach, referral, and networking.

We learned too that adding shower, laundry, and cooking facilities and a private bathroom with a shower to our building creates flexibility so we can be responsive when needs or inspiration arise.



We do not have the resources/expertise within our congregation to create shelters or transitional housing. We will need to partner with other community partners, such as SMYAL, MoCo Reconnect, Community Reach.

**Care of Our Neighbors, Goal #2: Increase community use of RUC campus & community engagement.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Conduct Twinbrook community needs assessment,**
- **Explore partnerships with local (and other) progressive churches, interfaith connections including non-Christian communities for the provision of services to the community,**
- **Establish volunteer system that supports Care of our Neighbors efforts,**
- **Provide LGBTQ sensitivity training to MCPS teachers and staff,**
- **Partner with Montgomery County Police Department to combat hate/bias incidents against the LGBTQ community.,**
- **Support MoCo LGBTQ Teen Forum,**
- **Host the area NOH8 Campaign photoshoot.**
- **Conduct needs assessment of Montgomery County youth for emergency assistance, food, clothing, medical, counseling, GED preparation, etc. with focus on LGBTQ youth and youth experiencing homelessness.,**
- **Explore feasibility of creating and/or supporting drop-in center and/or transitional house/housing for youth experiencing homelessness, including LGBTQ youth.**

## Mission Priority #3: Commitment to Social Justice

### Vision

Our intention is to educate and mobilize the Rockville United Church towards action on denominational, global, national, and local social justice issues, guided by PC(USA) and UCC policy statements.



### Goal #1: Develop Social Justice Initiatives

The visioning process demonstrated great interest and enthusiasm in the following social justice arenas: racial justice, Poor People’s Campaign (PPC), LGBTQ rights and earth care.



**Commitment to Social Justice, Goal #1: Develop social justice involvement.**

#### Initiatives:

- **Continue to support the Poor People’s Campaign (PPC),**
- **Continue to support LGBTQ rights,**
- **Develop an action plan to pursue racial justice,**
- **Develop Earth Care Working Group.**

### Goal #2: Align RUC Leadership Structures with Mission Priorities

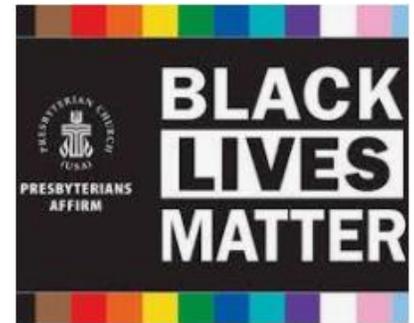
Create and empower a new Social Advocacy Committee. This committee will coordinate our advocacy efforts around the issues, such as: racial justice, earth care justice, LGBTQ, immigrant justice, etc. The LGBTQ Outreach Group and the PPC would sit under this committee. This committee would also be charged with establishing a formalized relationship with our social justice partners. We will recruit congregational members to offer volunteer leadership in support of social justice efforts.



**Commitment to Social Justice, Goal #2: Align RUC leadership structure with social justice priorities.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Create Social Advocacy Committee to focus on racial justice, PPC, LGBTQ rights,**
- **Align staffing needs to support this new initiative,**
- **Consider leadership & administrative support,**
- **Develop an agile network to provide a timely communication of calls for action.**



**Goal #3: Strengthen Connections with other Social Justice Groups**

Until all of us are equal, none of us are equal. Cultural change requires solidarity with those who are oppressed; therefore, we need to be in communion with them and follow their leadership. We also must join hands with other organizations who are striving similarly such as our denominational partners, Community Reach, the Poor People’s Campaign, Interfaith Alliance, etc.

**Commitment to Social Justice, Goal #3: Strengthen connections with other social justice groups.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Build partnerships to address social advocacy.**



**Goal #4: Reflect Justice Priorities in Building and Grounds**

Create an inviting visual, outdoor witness to the importance of social justice at Rockville United Church. The stations will be attractively signed and spread over the Church grounds. Each station will have a written plaque, a smart phone-accessible audio story, and flagstones engraved with social justice quotes and/or scripture to mark the path between stations. Ideas for the stations are LGBTQ Station (replica of the Pride float used for years by RUC), Community Reach History Station, Habitat for Humanity Station, RUC’s History of Fighting Racist Redlining Station, Earth Care Station, etc.



Leverage our geographical proximity to the centers of power to serve as temporary rallying point for protests downtown. To be used as temporary meeting and lodging spaces; facilities need

upgrades with showers, laundry facilities, modular furniture downstairs, and storage space for cots; and enhanced accessibility.

**Commitment to Social Justice, Goal #4: Reflect justice priorities in building and grounds.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Create Justice Walk,**
- **Explore becoming rallying point for protests.**



## Mission Priority #4: Care of the Earth

### Vision

The earth and all creation are God's. God calls us to be careful, humble caretakers of this earth and to protect and restore it for its own sake and for the future use and enjoyment of the human family. At RUC, we respect the earth God created, recognize our responsibility as God's stewards to care conscientiously for all creation, and strive to integrate environmental stewardship throughout all aspects of our life together.

### Goal 1#: Make Structural Changes to Integrate the Care of the Earth Perspective throughout our Congregation and into the Community.

The visioning process supported structural changes around this priority: create a garden ministry, add an earth care elder, renew the Green Committee. A new structure should integrate the Care of the Earth perspective throughout our congregation and into the community, through awareness, education, practice, and outreach and ensure structures are in place to offer ongoing support and oversight.

The Council Elders considered the options in spring 2021 and recommended an Earth Care Working Group as an initial structure. We recommend revisiting this decision to be sure it is the best one.

**Care of the Earth, Goal #1: Make structural changes to integrate the Care of the Earth perspective throughout our congregation and into the community.**

#### Initiatives:

- **Support the creation and work of the Earth Care Working Group,**
- **Support the financial needs of the Earth Care Working Group,**
- **Identify the most suitable ongoing structure to support the Care of the Earth mission priority.**

### Goal #2: Be the Green Church in Practice. Make our building and grounds a sustainability statement

We will build on earlier work to be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly within the building, such as replacing older fixtures with LED lighting, composting kitchen waste, and



avoiding single-use plates. Further, we will continue earlier projects on the grounds that include native plantings and “lasagna” garden beds inspired by Pastor Scott’s sabbatical. Our grounds and building should exhibit our values; the following initiatives can make them visible.



**Care of the Earth, Goal #2: Be the Green Church in practice. Make our building and grounds a sustainability statement.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Add no-mow plantings on the hillside on Farragut Avenue,**
- **Create a dry stream bed for water runoff,**
- **Provide rain barrels or cisterns for roof storm runoff,**
- **Attempt to use natural, recycled and otherwise sustainable materials in all of the building projects,**
- **Investigate the feasibility of solar panels or other alternate energy sources,**
- **Add more native plantings to reduce grass coverage by 50%,**
- **Increase sustainable and organic practices in our produce garden and on our grounds,**
- **Create and maintain with Rockville Rotary and Scouts a butterfly garden.**

**Goal #3: Be the Green Church through Outreach. Support environmental social justice and mission.**

We want the garden to continue benefiting the community, through donations to Manna Food Rescue of cash from sales of excess produce and of excess produce. We will explore other ways the garden and land could benefit our neighbors, as part of examining neighborhood needs (mentioned above under Care of our Neighbor). In addition to outreach to our local neighbors, we propose partnering with our denominations and other groups, especially local ones, to support environmental social justice.



**Care of the Earth, Goal #3: Be the Green Church through outreach. Support environmental social justice and mission.**

**Initiatives:**

- **Provide benefit to the community from our garden,**
- **Partner with our denominations and other groups to support environmental social justice,**
- **Be a sponsoring congregation to Presbytery Earthen Hands Ministry mission church.**



## Strategic Use of Buildings and Grounds

### Vision

The intention of renovations to the church building and grounds is to enhance and evolve current facility and property as a vehicle to live into RUC vision and values and to enhance our spiritual practice, experience, and expression. The four RUC foundational mission priorities (Care of the RUC Family, Care of our Neighbors, Commitment to Social Justice, and Care of the Earth) are woven throughout and prioritized the proposed building and grounds-related projects outlined below. Additional values that further bolstered these efforts are:

- Enhancing accessibility,
- Celebrating diversity and inclusion,
- Embracing technology,
- Creating flexibility in building and grounds to be responsive when needs or inspiration arise.

### Build a Playground

We envision this as an interactive art and play center, accessible and intergenerational. It should have play equipment, natural landscape elements, sensory experiences (chimes) and provide opportunities for artistic expression for the children and adults of the congregation and local artists.

### Create an Outside Fellowship Space

If we can create a space that serves as a transition between the inside and outside, we can extend the life of the congregation into nature and into the neighborhood. A terrace or deck could be a place where we gather to picnic, watch movies together, and provide live music for ourselves and neighbors. A gazebo or pergola could enhance our ability to rent our facilities and provide a focus for ceremonial use (weddings, blessing of the animals and other worship opportunities). It would lessen the image of our church as an isolated building on a hill and create a sense of invitation.

### Enhance the Memorial Garden

Enhancements to the current garden will increase accessibility and create a place for gathering and for solitude. Adding a gate will invite members and neighbors to enter and will define the sacred ground. Adding the names of those interred will celebrate and remember our RUC saints.



### Renovate the Kitchen

Improve efforts at food missions, enhance fellowship use of building for ourselves and renters.

### Improve the Accessibility and Flexibility of our Building

Elevator installation, upgraded and all-gender downstairs bathroom renovations, and new shower and sleeping facilities will provide opportunities and flexibility for our programming.

### Make our Parking Lot an Outreach to the Community and Statement of our Values

To make our parking lot an outreach to the community and a statement of our values, we will add art on the asphalt to reflect our values (our own BLM plaza), make the lot available for a farmers' market, or another function useful to our neighbors



#### **Strategic Use of Building and Grounds, Goal #1: Make our building and grounds more accessible.**

##### **Initiatives:**

- Add an elevator,
- Widen doorways,
- Renovate lower-level bathrooms,
- Improve access to memorial garden.



#### **Strategic Use of Building and Grounds, Goal #2: Improve our flexibility for mission work.**

##### **Initiatives:**

- Add shower and laundry facilities in lower level,
- Provide sleeping facilities, furniture, and storage for overnight/emergency shelter,
- Renovate kitchen.

#### **Strategic Use of Building and Grounds, Goal #3: Create welcoming spaces.**

##### **Initiatives:**

- Provide outside fellowship space,
- Improve the memorial garden; add a prayer wall and names of interred,
- Provide an interactive play and art space.
- Renovate kitchen.