

ROCKVILLE UNITED CHURCH VISIONING EVENT

Oct. 22-24, Nov. 7, and Dec. 10, 2020

Summarized and analyzed by Elizabeth Cooper-Martin, member Strategic Planning
Task Force,
based on report by Jill White, United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund

Visioning Process

Information Gathering Sessions

The Visioning Process began with gathering information from church leaders and members of Rockville United Church (RUC) during three Zoom sessions held October 22 – 24, 2020. A total of 50 leaders and members including Rev. Scott Winnette and Pastor Jennifer Knutsen, participated across the three sessions. Additionally, members who could not join a live session could respond by email; four members did so.

Each information session began with Jill White, Regional Mission Interpreter, United Church of Christ (UCC) Church Building & Loan Fund, discussing the importance of knowing the church's why – knowing what they were doing to deploy their assets for mission and live into God's economy. Following this presentation, Jill divided attendees into small groups of four or five to discuss nine questions addressing vision for the congregation over the next one to five years:

1. What current programs or mission emphases should be enhanced and how?
2. What programs or mission emphases should be added?
3. What current programs or mission emphases should be discontinued?
4. What non-programmatic things could the church do to strengthen and expand its ministry?
5. What improvements, renovations, and/or new construction?
6. What resources should the church be providing its members?
7. What resources should the church be providing the wider community?
8. What are the top three needs in your community?
9. What do you believe God might be calling you to do as a congregation?

Development of Mission Priorities

Forty-two RUC members and leaders, including Rev. Scott Winnette and Pastor Jennifer Knutsen, gathered on Saturday, November 7, 2020, for Day 2 of the Visioning Process. The session began with participants in small groups; their task was to identify common themes within the list of compiled question responses. They identified the following themes:

- Care of the earth
- Buildings & grounds enhancement including environmental, use & availability, greening, garden, playground
- Outreach & advocacy, including LGBTQ
- Congregational health & vitality
 - Care for members – program support, congregational care
 - Care of one another within congregation
 - Internal capacity building
 - Children's & youth programs
- Care of others outside of the congregation; local community (geographical)/Community Reach
- Justice ministry/Poor People's Campaign/racism/racial social justice
- Care outside local community/outward-facing programs
- Disaster response (housing)
- Communication/technology/tools for engagement – virtual, building use, enhancing worship experience

After much discussion and wordsmithing, the following mission priorities were agreed upon:

- Care of one another (within congregation)
- Care of community/neighborhood
- Commitment to social justice, anti-racism, and civil rights
- Care of the earth

Next, those gathered broke into five small groups. Each group was assigned the responses from one of the information sessions' questions (i.e., 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7) and categorized each response to one or more of the mission priorities. During the lunch break, Jill sorted all responses into the group-assigned mission priorities and created a list or "ballot" for participants to record their individual votes.

Following lunch, participants were instructed to vote on those items under the four mission categories. Participants could use their 15 votes as desired – more than one vote for a given item or choosing 15 different items upon which to vote. After voting, individuals emailed their ballots to Jill for final tallying.

Voting and Discussion of the Strategic Plan of Implementation

Twenty-seven individuals representing the church council, Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF), and others that had participated in prior Visioning Process sessions, including Rev. Scott Winnette and Pastor Jennifer Knutsen, attended the final session on December 10, 2021. Jill reviewed her work after the November 7th session, presented the top vote receivers, and led a discussion of them. She also explained the importance of knowing external and internal context and shared information on demographic tools for external analysis, as well as ways to perform an internal assessment. Lastly, Jill reviewed the process for drafting the Strategic Plan of Implementation.

The top themes, based on total votes, for each priority (using names as revised by the Strategic Planning Task Force) were as follows:

- Mission Priority 1, Care of the RUC Family
 - Continue Zoom meetings and worship; continue social connections made digitally.
 - Build playground.
 - Support congregational care.
- Mission Priority 2, Care of our Neighbors
 - Support Community Reach (including Kaseman Clinic) with time and treasure.
 - Provide safe spaces and other support for LGBTQ youth.
 - Use buildings and grounds for the benefit of the community.
- Mission Priority 3, Commitment to Social Justice
 - Be involved in Poor People's Campaign.
 - Support racial justice, work with Rev. Jennifer.
 - Continue LGBTQ and transgender outreach and support.
- Mission Priority 4, Care of the Earth
 - Be a Green Church.
 - Expand community use of and benefit from our garden.
 - Enhance garden ministry with Elder/committee.

Tables 1-4 present full details on voting for each item, organized by mission priority.

Theme	Table 1, page 1 MP1: Care of One Another (within Congregation)	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
Continue Zoom meetings and worship; continue social connections made digitally	Keep virtual platforms <i>interactive</i> even when we are back in the building	7	33	7
	As we transition into using the building more, continue to do worship and some activities on Zoom	4		4
	Keep some special programs to happen on Zoom (easier commute and convenience of being in one place and flexibility of how/when to participate)	4		4
	Zoom church option continue	3		3
	Continue Zoom meetings for some church committee meetings	1		
	Keep the connections with people who are not in our immediate community but have connected with us through Zoom	4		4
	Find a dedicated online coordinator, who can manage our online presence and our virtual services	4		2
	How can there be socializing for folks who are participating digitally, once building re-opens	2		2
	keep a list of people worshipping with us on Zoom who are not local and not members so we can reach out to them to see how they want to stay connected	1		1
	Individual training to members who struggle with the electronic services	2		2
	Use online platforms to tell stories of individuals (like happen at the galas) - we now have an ability to tell stories that we didn't have before	1		1
Playground	Enhance the children's ministry program by building a playground	18	29	5
	Build a playground and invite neighbors to use it (MP2)	6		6
	Playground (MP2)	2		2
	Invite the children and youth to use the grounds, parking lot and playground for activities perhaps with signs of welcome (MP2)	1		1
	Thanksgiving gifts for immediate neighbors including note that we'll be building a playground for all to use (MP2)	1		1
Congregational care & support	Congregational Care Committee--strengthen	5	20	5
	Member outreach and support (emotional, economic, as well as health)	5		5
	Continue to be the kind of community that supports each other. We are a family beyond sitting in the pews on Sunday morning	2		2
	Mental illness support group	2		2
	Health support	1		1
	Emotional outreach and support	1		1
	Economic outreach and support	1		1
	Health outreach and support	1		1
	help with major transitions, decisions, resources assisted living	1		1
	More in-home services for our members who are homebound	1		1
Provide pastoral care to members	Strengthen pastoral services, especially for those at home	7	18	3
	prayerful assistance/pastoral care for grief-stricken, hospital visits, illnesses	3		3
	Pastoral counseling to members	3		3
	Pastoral care. We do it, but don't lose it.	3		3
	develop a lay ministry like Stephen Ministry, like Carol Bentson did before	1		1
	Pastors do annual "spiritual check ins" with congregants	1		1
Youth	NOISY (middle and high school youth) maybe not enough teen support now but need to put more resources into hiring a person for this group and providing support for food and programming	10	17	4
	Student outreach and specific ways for seniors (Celebrating Seniors) and teens to interact - maybe an intergenerational breakfast once a month	4		4
	Noisy program (Youth Program) with more mission emphasis, including mission trips on some basis - Noisy to Rainbow shelter	2		2
	Service projects like Habitat for Humanity for teens need to come back	1		1

Theme	Table 1, page 2 MP1: Care of One Another (within Congregation)	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
Continue and enhance small groups & education	Enhance small groups work and continue to provide remote gathering opportunities, even when/if we return to in-person gatherings	8	16	8
	Small group programs -- enhance variety, additional adult education opportunities	2		2
	Continue small group ministries	2		2
	Find a way to do in person small group gatherings - use a sign-up, meet outside, bring your own chair and snack, etc.	2		2
	Solid good teaching, preaching, bonds of fellowship and support	1		1
	Enhance education programs for children and adults by improving facilities, adding small group programs	1		1
Celebrating Seniors	Celebrating Seniors	12	12	
Care for younger members / younger families / young adults	Resources to help younger families to keep them engaged -- conscious efforts to find out what younger families need/want from their church family	3	9	3
	Congregational care, expand support for younger members and members of the community; Young adult meet up events for larger community. Advertise with programs that young adults use.	2		2
	Find out what younger members need from the church so we can find ways to support them	2		2
	Take special care of group of young parents, especially during COVID-19	1		1
	Find a way to have periodic outreach to young families that serves the families rather than puts more time pressure on them. RUC'ers could each 'adopt' a young family.	1		1
Sharing members' skills	Find other ways to share the collective knowledge of our members - "Sharing Our Knowledge"	1	7	1
	Data base of skills of church members who would be willing to volunteer their skills to help each other and those outside the church. Set up a system of trading skills? An internal "Angie's List"? (Angel's list)	5		5
	Respond to members who have needs too. Identify a vehicle for identifying congregational needs and matching them with members who have expertise	1		1
Worship	worship, music	1	8	1
	Beautiful music	5		5
	Insightful Worship continue to enhance worship	2		2
Support fellowship	Activities that support fellowship, e.g., yard sale (now defunct) & fund-raising dinner	3	7	3
	Continue front-yard meetups - provide a sign-up list	2		2
	The coffee hour is important because of the community and friendships and experiencing support	2		2
Expand communication	Better communication beyond Friday email from committees and from Council	2	4	2
	Weekly printed communication (What's Happening) sent to all members with the invitation to opt out of receiving it if they prefer only receiving the email version. Ensure that new members receive it.	2		2
Children	Integrate kids with the music resources that are abundant at RUC	3	4	2
	Enhance the work with children, excellent and thoughtful child educators	1		1
Comments on staff	Be sure that we adequately support our staff in all ways	6		6
	Reassess our staff needs	1		1
	better supervision, allocation of administrative staff	1		1
Other actions	Make building handicap accessible	5		5
	Enhance the Memorial Garden	4		3
	program for the contemplative introverts among us...retreats, workshop, adult ed., bringing in authors	1		1
	How can we determine if members/families have the level of contact they want to have	1		1
	Official biography for each member on Realm, like the ones we provide for a new member, including youth and children	1		1
	Bring ideas to the wider congregation for support so that no 1 or 2 people have to carry the ball	1		1

Theme	<p style="text-align: center;">Table 2, page 1 MP2: Care of Community / Neighborhood</p>	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
Support Community Reach (including Kaseman Clinic) with time and treasure	Continue to support Community Reach and its services to our community - emphasize volunteer opportunities and ways of giving funds and goods	58	80	23
	Community Reach - enhance ties to build commitment in next generation within congregation	4		4
	Continue to give financially to Community Reach but continue to explain why and make particular connections	3		2
	Ensure Community Reach is basic mission of RUC	1		1
	Language Outreach Program part of Community Reach of Montgomery County	1		1
	Community Reach (CR) - more COVID testing, hands on, look for more opportunities to engage individuals and groups with CR, including volunteer opportunities or Committee working or whole church, try to come up with new fellowship activity that engages people	1		1
	Community Reach - live into our new relationship with improved communication	1		1
	Partner with Community Reach	1		1
	support of Community Reach, service Saturday	1		1
	Field trip into the community to learn about Community Reach	1		1
	Kaseman Clinic - help expand and enhance capacity, maybe helping fund a mobile unit, recruiting more volunteer medical personnel. Do more to help with supply drives	6		5
	Kaseman Clinic, what are their needs?	1		1
	Mission in and of itself should be enhanced - participate in marches that align with RUC values, work with Kaseman Clinic to make sure that transgender health needs are met	1		1
Provide safe spaces and other support for LGBTQ youth	Help create a "Sanctuary" for LGBTQ teens who are in unsafe and unwelcoming homes. Possibly start with a drop-in center, then build to a home where teens age 16 and up can live and build community.	9	33	7
	Expand our programs for youth, teens and early adulthood - LGBTQ outreach, provide services such as homes, job counseling, resume writing, cooking to those aging out of foster care or public schools	19		8
	Purchase a property for mixed-use of commercial and homes for homeless LGBTQ youth	5		4
Use building & grounds for the benefit of the community: variety of specific ways	Farmers market in parking lot - could include a crafters market, outside Christmas bazaar?	5	31	4
	Programs more open to the neighborhood around us - end of life, interest to the community around us, outreach , especially if election is right wing	4		4
	Music program - performance space, invite groups in to perform, youth choir, RUC choir performing elsewhere in community	3		3
	Become host for Habitat for Humanity, other groups coming to MD, like for women's march, immigrant families, disaster response "builds"	3		3
	Narcotics Anonymous - offer more meeting times, expand outreach to other similar groups such as NAMI	2		2
	Open the building and grounds to accommodate more health care providers, pet services (adopt, neuter, spay)	2		2
	RUC should open its doors to music recitals, community meetings , etc. and devote resources toward marketing toward such	2		2
	We have wi-fi at the church so if teens or others need it for school the church could provide it, even in the parking lot	2		2
	Music outreach, more concerts? Open mic coffee hour?	2		2
	(as fewer people are going to offices) Could use church school rooms and as-needed offices to rent out to community members, allowing people to work from church with wi-fi and conference rooms	2		2
	Community English language learning	1		1
	Invite neighbors to music and food events	1		1
	One time events like the Covid-19 testing that serve the community and the neighborhood	2		2

Theme	Table 2, page 2 MP2: Care of Community / Neighborhood	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
General comments to increase community use of building & grounds	Use the grounds as a community/neighborhood resource	6	25	6
	See the building used more in some way (could be for revenue) but more importantly for stewardship of building as a resource	6		6
	Programs that allow the community to tap our grounds and building	6		6
	Increasing the building usage	3		3
	With better facilities, could offer more use of physical space	2		1
	Use parking lot for events for community too	2		2
	Think of fellowship room as a community room, rentable party room	2		2
	Consider what might be needed to have the building used beyond the worshipping community (ideas might be nursery school?)	1		1
Partner with others	Joining up with allies in similarly progressive churches (from MP#3)	6	14	6
	More interfaith connections, including non-Christian communities	4		4
	Continue to partner with local groups on ideas and projects that fit in with our values	2		1
	Dialogue between church and local law enforcement and community members	1		1
	Inter- intra-faith, interdenominational cooperation/community projects	1		1
Share playground with our neighbors	Moved to MP 1: Care of each other			
Garden	Moved to MP 4: Care of the earth			
Engage with Twinbrook /local neighborhood	Helping to support families in Twinbrook neighborhood, child care or after school care programs	2	8	2
	Twinbrook association: can we join it? Or a similar neighborhood link? Or a Montgomery County one? Be intentional to join and support needs of the Twinbrook community	3		3
	Partner with local schools , particularly ones with a larger percentage of lower income students to ensure they have technology to be successful. Offer to help with training.	2		2
	Engagement in the social problems of the community, i.e. drug issues, safety	1		1
General ideas to reach community	Bring more people in by Zoom - hold seminars	2	7	1
	Do church by being more intentional about not just doing the Language program, but also other outreach	2		2
	Strong connection to community around church to avoid only internal focus	1		1
	Letting the community know we are welcoming community - How are we part of the larger community	1		1
	Sharing of knowledge	1		1
Support for specific outreach programs	Disaster response in its many machinations - mission teams to rebuild, working at New Windsor Brethren	8		3
	Continue to support our food programs : Shepherd's Table, Service Saturday, Rainbow Place with more advertising and soliciting of volunteers	5		5
	Habitat for Humanity - find ways to bring it more local	2		2
	Bigger international focus	1		1
Support LatinX/Hispanic/Latino community	partnering with LatinX community in new ways	2	5	2
	More ecumenical supports for the local Hispanic community (immigrant rights, ESL, rights with law enforcement)	2		2
	Specific outreach to the Latino community; and the neighborhood in particular	1		1

Table 3				
Theme	MP3: Commitment to Social Justice, Anti-racism, and Civil rights	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
Poor People's Campaign	Build upon recent discussions of white privilege and growing support of the Poor People's Campaign by making sure all mission activities are informed by the principles of the Poor People's Campaign, centering the voices of impacted groups, recognizing the intersection of racial, economic, and environmental injustice, and focusing on systemic change, not just on aid/charity	28	49	17
	Develop a justice ministry to support the rights of immigrants in our community. Develop an adult-education program around the platform of the Poor People's Campaign	5		5
	Enhancing involvement in Poor People's Campaign	3		2
	More engagement with Poor Peoples' campaign, including low income housing, to help low income people generally	2		2
	Develop the Poor People's Campaign agenda to develop the connection between RUC and Montgomery County; and find out connections where some of our current members live (MP2)	11		7
Racial Justice, work with Rev. Jennifer	Along with greater emphasis on Racial Justice, if/when Jennifer would be willing to take on a full time position.	17	40	10
	Tap into Rev. Jennifer's expertise on understanding racism	6		6
	build tie-ins to Rev. Jennifer's racial justice studies	4		2
	Support work for Racial Justice by partnering with the Poor People's Campaign	4		4
	More opportunities to understand white privilege and dismantle systemic racism	3		2
	Black lives matter ongoing efforts	3		1
	Racial Justice	3		3
LGBTQ and Transgender outreach and support	Focus on LGBTQ community, specifically transgender and the intersectionality with other issues	16	26	12
	LGBTQ outreach and support	6		5
	Transgender outreach and support	4		2
Take action	Enhance Church in Society mission become more action based than just financial base	3	8	3
	Depending on the election, add action-oriented activities to support civil liberties and protect human rights	1		1
	Offer training for non-violent resistance - "Make Good Trouble"	3		3
	Teach and provide ways to be consciously in resistance	1		1
Accessibility	Make building handicap accessible	5	5	5
Other	Focus on diversity and inclusion of people of color	2		2
	Serve as sanctuary church	1		1

Theme	Table 4 MP4: Care of the Earth	# Votes	Sum for theme	# People
Green Church	If Biden elected then more programs on environmental protection and climate change; enhance environmental protections; more actions around being a "green church"	13	31	6
	Continue to expand our environmental consciousness - renew the green committee	8		6
	Earth care/earth friendliness of building, facilities, yards, outreach in community	7		7
	Any action that enables us to be a 'greener' spot in the community	4		4
Expand community use of and benefit from our Garden	Bigger community garden, open neighbors	5	17	5
	Strengthen the community garden, link to elementary school for them to use it (originally MP2)	1		1
	Garden project enhanced by adding a component to the community - education, additional plots for community, or for teaching children how to plant (originally MP2)	5		5
	Garden - expand to use harvest for feeding others through Service Saturday, meals served after church, market table for community (originally MP2)	3		3
	community program partnerships, e.g., DaySpring Earthen Hands - link to person who has Presbytery grant to provide environmental preaching to churches	3		2
Garden ministry/elder/committee	Create an official garden ministry	3	13	3
	Elevate visibility and multi-faceted activities of Environmental Vision and Mission by creating Earth-Care Elder position and associated committee to address the full scope of the 2013 statement's original intent	11		5
Landscaping	Quick wins for environmental stewardship - rain gardens, native plantings	3	5	3
	"Conservation landscaping"	2		2