

Challenges and Opportunities Team

Introduction: At last year's congregational meeting: The following motion was presented and approved:

Council (or its designees), at the 2018 Congregational Meeting, will present a view of challenges and opportunities for Ivy Chapel over the next 5 years.

Intro: In response to the motion presented at last November's Congregational Meeting, Council chose to set up an ad hoc committee to report to today's meeting.

The committee members included: Anna DiVesta, Nancy Litzinger, Nancy Marston, Jennifer Noonan, Tom Wehling, Bruce Wilking, Sally Dodge, and me (Michael Winship).

The committee has met multiple times since May.

We decided to learn what we could from other churches and review what had been suggested from our own members through old surveys, etc. We visited some other churches to gauge what they were doing to meet goals and objectives. We discussed other programs designed to help churches determine goals/options for the future.

Last week, a new response card to the opportunity/challenge 3X5 card from one of our youth. It said: To make a lot of friends and be nice to everyone. This seems like a good jumping off point to the rest of our presentation.

As part of our information gathering, we visited other Churches, UCC as well as other denominations, met with a member of a UCC Church in the process of revitalization and with Associate Conference minister Tyler Connoley who is assigned to support churches seeking to revitalize.

Methodology and Charge: In visiting other Churches, we realized that declining and aging membership are typical of most mainline denominations. This seems to be the path for churches content with the status quo. Some churches have attracted more people by having contemporary as well as traditional services. Thriving churches have a zeal for inclusion and social justice and have a clearly defined mission. In comparison to churches we visited, Ivy's strengths in its music and youth programs stood out.

In September, the committee met with Susan Brand, a former Ivy member from Pilgrim Congregational UCC in the city of St. Louis. Faced with the choice of revitalizing the church or disbanding, Pilgrim chose the former. They have undertaken the New Beginnings Process offered by Hope Partnerships, which after an initial assessment, involved training and small group and congregational meetings. Pilgrim has embraced this process and in partnership with neighboring churches, increased involvement with the community while making more efficient use of the Church's space.

The committee met with Associate Conference minister Tyler Connoley in October. He thought Ivy was typical of UCC churches in the area and is in a good position to start the assessment process to plan for the future. He emphasized that the focus should not be on weekly attendance at our services, but on determining who we are as a congregation and having a well-defined vision and mission. He offered assessment tools available through the Missouri-Mid-South Conference and recommended we explore professional services such as Holy Cow consultants and Hope Partnerships.

Challenges:

What evidence of vitality exists now? Are we a positive force in the community? To what degree? Who are our neighbors? What constitutes community?

How actively are we engaged beyond strong financial support when needs arise (new roof, emergency system). How many members/what percentage of congregants are active in community service? And same for efforts that sustain Ivy...Sunday school teachers, organizing events, et cetera. How much do actively organize and how much do we actively attend? How engaged are our congregants?

Is there a clear mission and purpose? The current mission statement should be in your hands today. How many people are familiar with that or know where to find it?

NEED something simple, direct – that everyone knows and can state: who are we and who are we called to be? Without that, we can't make decisions about the future.

Opportunities:

- *Vitality 'scale' from an Illinois pastor: excitement about the future
- congregation is always ready to try something new
- church seeks and uses the gifts of members of all ages
- church is recognized as a positive force in the community
- church helps members live out their faith in daily life

*Past survey data showed members are satisfied: How relevant is that info now? We need evidence concerning what members believe, care about and are willing to commit to through action...this requires an effective questionnaire that provides current insights

So:

Challenge: We don't know with concrete data:

- a) What we care about in an active sense
- b) Who we are as a congregation at this moment in time

Opportunity: We can find out what we care about and what will engage our community to stimulate vitality and create excitement about our future path.

We don't know where Ivy members want to go next...So our recommendation and the motion that we're presenting for your consideration is for funds for a survey created by an unusually named consulting group to determine **where members want to go in the future AND to gauge readiness for change.**

Holy Cow consulting got its name from the response clients had to their surveys: "HOLY COW, how did you find out so much about us?" This tool was created by professionals who know how to develop and appropriately word questions...AND is customizable. Our responses are benchmarked with their database of over 3000 churches that includes but is not exclusive to UCC congregations. Their firm was recommended by Assoc. Conf. Min. Rev. Tyler Connoley in our meeting with him; he learned about their services from a national UCC staff member. The survey can be done on-line or on paper; it takes about 30 minutes. **But we need the participation of every member**... AND we'll need a committed group to oversee this process.

This is a first step but it feels like the right fit with where we are...Yes, we've done surveys – but not professionally constructed or interpreted. And not as comprehensive as this tool is. This is definitely a different ballgame.

Rev. Connoley made 2 statements when he met with us that resonated as we conclude this initial exploration:

- “In the past 10 years, 2 churches in the St.L. Assoc. gained members –and one is a very small church that accepted 2 or 3 new folks.”
- “This is a great time for Ivy to have a conversation about the future...because you're not desperate – so you have a lot of choices.”

Rest assured that our committee has not been about doom and gloom but rather has focused on what we see as our current reality and has researched options and opportunities. We believe it's time to begin the process of discovering where we want to go...where we want to direct our energy...

While the motion is being distributed, here is an explanation of the variables that dictate the fuzzy \$ amount:

- Survey is \$430
- Interpretation is \$350 for 2 hours on-line OR \$1200 for a 4-hour in-person visit + travel expenses that usually run around \$350...so minimum total of \$780 and max of \$2K.

Our committee felt that those leading the next phase (survey/interpretation/next steps) should have the freedom to decide which form of interpretation they prefer: facetime on-line or in person.

The motion:

The committee that has been studying challenges and opportunities for Ivy Chapel UCC moves that the congregation authorize today an expenditure in 2019 not to exceed \$2,000. The funds will be used to engage Holy Cow Consulting for services that include conducting and interpreting a membership survey, “The Congregation Assessment Tool” (CAT). This expense is separate from and in addition to the 2019 budget.

Anna DiVesta

Sally Dodge

Nancy Litzinger

Nancy Marston

Jennifer Noonan

Tom Wehling

Bruce Wilking

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