

Listenings...

On February 26th, the TPC community came out in full strength to participate in our “Creating Our Future” visioning process. The results speak vividly of a community whose members aspire to connect more deeply with one another, with the world, and with our spiritual wellsprings. At the end of the day, congregational goals were ranked as follows: (1) Strengthen Congregational Community, (2) Work for Social Justice, (3) Nurture Spirituality, (4) Embrace Diversity, (5) Improve Our Facility, (6) Increase Our Visibility In The Local Community. A full presentation of everyone’s ideas is posted on the church website (tparkerchurch.org), but right now, let’s take a look at the top four aspirations.

“Strengthening Congregational Community” came out, hands down, as the most widely embraced goal. We want to build on the healthy, loving community we have by 1) increasing *interconnections and mutual support between groups*, 2) creating more opportunities to *deepen interpersonal relationships*, particularly through small social and spiritual gatherings; and 3) fostering *intergenerational exchange in all aspects* of our community life.

“Working for Social Justice” came in as the second most prominent concern. While affirming the importance of the fundraising and charitable work we already do, many want to see us become more *active* in working for social change. There was a broad aspiration to engage with the world beyond ourselves in a bold, meaningful, and committed way, connecting with other communities locally and abroad, and making a difference through sustained projects.

In order to keep our own wellsprings filled, “Nurturing Spirituality” came in a very close third amongst the top aspirations. Various means were suggested, from the didactic (lecture series, classes, learning about other religions) to the *relational* (book discussions, small group ministry) to the *experiential* (prayer circle, meditation group, art- and music-making).

The strong showing for “Embracing Diversity” reflects the congregation’s desire welcome difference within TPC as well as connect with other communities that are different from our own. Three ideas about how to achieve this appeared repeatedly: 1) carry forward the *Welcoming Congregation* process, 2) become handicap accessible, and 3) develop a relationship with a “sister church” either in urban Boston or abroad, perhaps in Central America.

Keep in mind that as we engaged in our day of visioning, members were not asked what they love about the church and would continue, but rather, how we can grow, evolve and better express our purpose. Given how the conversation was framed, some of the best things we currently have going here at TPC are not even mentioned in the top goals, such as our religious education for children and our music and worship services. These omissions actually confirm the great work already going on. The congregational goals now challenge us to bring new focus and daring to what we already do and imagine ourselves capable of.

How to take next steps? Someone from the Visioning Planning Team (Jeremy Schumm, Michelle Schumm, Dave Newbold, Ben Fox, or myself) will begin by bringing the relevant data to each of our church's established committees and facilitating a brainstorm about how to move forward. Once each of those meetings has taken place, the Planning Team will dissolve as an entity. Starting with the leadership structure we already have in place, it will become the congregation's work to explore how to carry out its goals and to identify leaders who will shepherd the efforts. Each committee will be challenged to generate a five-year plan for the accomplishment of realistic short-, mid-, and long-range goals. It is likely that some goals will require dialogue and collaboration between different groups, and that new groups will form around specific initiatives. Each of us can find ways to participate in the endeavors we care most about.

I feel excited by the outcome of this process and am encouraged by the greater clarity it brings to our congregation's identity and mission. I look forward to working along side you as we bring the vision to life.

--Lilli