

First Congregational Church of Woodstock
2nd Hour Conversation November 7, 2021

Objectives

- A. Explore where we are and how we might meet this moment with hope, joy, faith, love, and wonder
- B. Ground us in important concepts that help more intentionally align what we do with who we are being called to be
- C. Provide context for how pieces fit together, e.g., Vision and Values, Restructuring, Community Framework, etc.

Agenda

- I. Welcome
- II. How we got here...
 - A. Holy Cow: Chaos or Transformation?
 - B. Search and Profile
 - C. 2021 Council touching the possibilities
- III. What we know: Challenge and Opportunity
- IV. What we might we do?
 - A. Intentionally reflect on who God is calling us to be and where God might be calling us to go.
 - B. Participate in inter-related, iterative activities to engage in conversations to pray and think and play with the promise and possibility
 - 1. Vision and Values Initiative: how we might “be” the church and this church today?
 - 2. Restructuring Initiative: simplify clarify, and align ministry, decision, and governance
 - 3. Empower, encourage, and inspire lifelong learners of the way of love
- V. Next Steps & Actions

Opening Prayer

“God, open my eyes that I might see this church as You see it. Let me see where change needs to take place, even if it is painful to me. And use me, I pray, to be an instrument of that change whatever the Cost.”

Source: Autopsy of a Deceased Church” Thom Rainer

When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

“God’s Spirit is on me; God has chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, ‘This is God’s year to act!’”

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, “You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place.”

- Luke 4:16-21

Healthy Conversation Guidelines

- a) Respect confidentiality
- b) Engage heart and head, emotion and reason
- c) Listen deeply, seek to understand, ask open questions, and refrain from problem solving or giving advice
- d) Honor individual truth of stories, experiences and feelings whether you agree
- e) Dance rather than fight
- f) Refrain from blame, shame, demonizing others, or victimizing yourself
- g) Self-report openly and honestly, e.g., use I language
- h) Avoid absolutizing
- i) Remain aware of intent vs. impact, and how to seek alignment rather than needing

Please use the GREEN sticky note to share one hope.

Please use the YELLOW sticky note to share one question or concern

I. Welcome

A. What is One Hope?

B. What is one Question or Concern?

II. How We Got Here

A. Holy Cow: Chaos or Transformation?

B. Search and Profile

C. 2021 Council touching the possibilities

III. What we know

Please use the PINK sticky note to share a challenge

Please use the ORANGE sticky note to share an opportunity

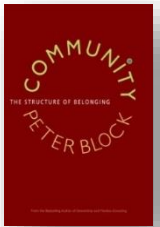
A. The challenge is “Church is not what it used to be”

What might be one challenge we face because Church is not what it used to be?

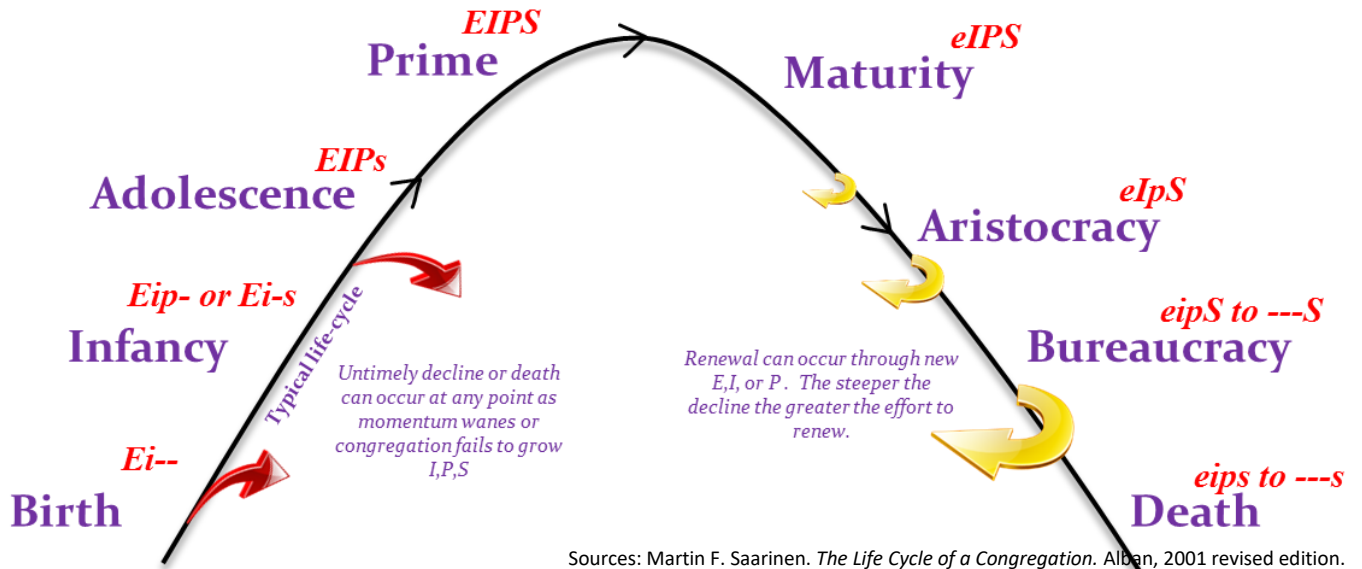
B. The opportunity is “Church is not what it used to be”

What might be one opportunity we have because Church is not what it used to be?

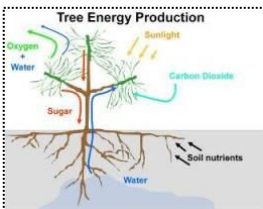
The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear and retribution. A new context acknowledges that **we have all the capacity, expertise, and resources that an alternative future requires.** Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness. The conversations that build relatedness most often occur through associational life, where (we) show up by choice, and rarely in the context of system life, where (we) show up out of obligation.



- C. As a “human system,” congregations move through seasons and cycles, which include birth, death, renewal, and resurrection. Four interrelated indicators help locate where we are as they foster the conditions in which life thrives and/or dies

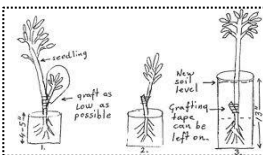


Sources: Martin F. Saarinen. *The Life Cycle of a Congregation*. Alban, 2001 revised edition. Alice Mann. *Can Our Church Live: Redeveloping Congregations in Decline*. Alban, 1999.



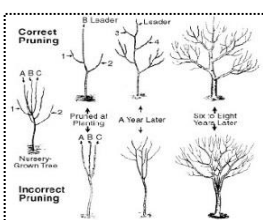
Energy:

vision, mission, hope, excitement, enthusiasm, and a sense of purpose and possibility. Whether or not people see that there is something greater than themselves that captivates their attention and compels them to work together for this greater good.



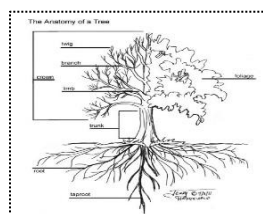
Inclusion:

how easy it is for strangers, newcomers and long-term members to integrate into leadership, teams, groups - and how intentionally/unintentionally inviting/disinviting the congregation is.



Programming:

The activities undertaken by congregants, groups, teams and committees to grow as a learning community and embody more fully Christ’s ministry in the world today. The activities seek to address the needs of congregants, the greater community, the environment, mission. The congregation with a highly developed “P” factor corresponds to the “Body of Christ” image.



Systems:

the processes and structures that define how decisions are made, activities priorities, conflicts resolved, and resources of the congregation allocated. In a high “S” environment all inter-relate in ways that lead toward realizing the vision and fulfilling the mission of the congregation.

IV. What might we do?

- A. Intentionally reflect on who God is calling us to be and where God might be calling us to go.
- B. Participate in inter-related, iterative activities to engage in conversations to pray and think and play with the promise and possibility
 1. Vision and Values Initiative: how we might “be” the church and this church today?

Vision and Values Initiative



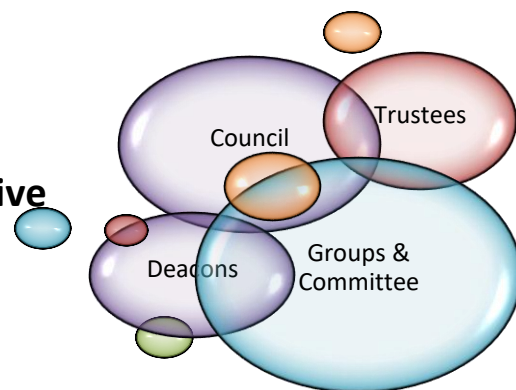
A spiritually grounded process to listen deeply for God’s Spirit guiding us through our hurts and hopes, experiences and inspirations.

- **Why?** Renewal can occur when a congregation is clear about its purpose and aligns its activities with pursuing God’s vision. It invites us to make explicit the things that hold meaning and frees us from doing things out of habit or obligation.
- **Who?** A team of 5 or so who will facilitate conversations to discern, as a body, our core values (and competing priorities), shared beliefs, mission, and God’s vision for us today.
- **How?** Engage the congregation in creative ways and open conversations to reveal our core values, ministry, mission, and purpose. Explore hurts, hopes, and big questions with and beyond current congregants.
- **When?** Team forming now, begin in New Year. Process might take 6 to 18 months or more, depending on rhythm of congregation.
- **What?**
 - **Core Values** — priorities, preferences, and consistent choices that drive decisions and shape culture of the congregation.
 - **Bedrock Beliefs** — principles and/or symbols of faith that matter most in our lives and life together as a congregation, e.g., God is love, Micah 6:8, “Joyful, Joyful,” an image like Earth Rise, etc.
 - **Vision** — an aspirational metaphor or image of the future to which God is calling us. It provides a sense of direction and inspires us to wonder. It cannot be fully contained by words or fulfilled within a life time, e.g., Land of Milk and Honey, kingdom of God; MLK’s Dream; a beacon of hope for all God’s children; the bridge; etc.
 - **Mission** — succinctly describes our purpose/why as a congregation to bring God’s vision near and further Christ’s ministry.
 - **Competing priorities** – assumptions, unstated priorities, and negative behaviors we habitually turn to in times of uncertainty and stress. They prevent us from embodying our values, living in alignment with our beliefs, pursuing God’s vision, and risking our best and deepest selves in service of Christ’s mission.

IV. What might we do? (cont)

2. Restructuring Initiative:
simplify clarify, and align
ministry, decision, and
governance

Restructuring Initiative



A focused working group to explore ways we might simplify and align our decision-making processes and structures based on our size, values, and ministry needs.

- **Why?** Current structure is based on a much larger congregation, can be cumbersome and timely to make a decision, and many committees are under/unstaffed.
- **Who?** A team of 5 or so review alternatives, facilitate conversations, and propose modifications to structure, process, responsibilities and by-laws.
- **How?** Review models from other congregations, explore by-law implications, and facilitate conversations among the congregation to review and iterate proposals, which eventually must come before the congregation to approve.
- **When?** Team forming now. Process will unfold over the coming year. Simple by-law changes may be part of 2022 Annual meeting.
- **What?**
 - By-laws
 - Document/clarify team purpose, roles, responsibilities, expectations, e.g., Community Framework.

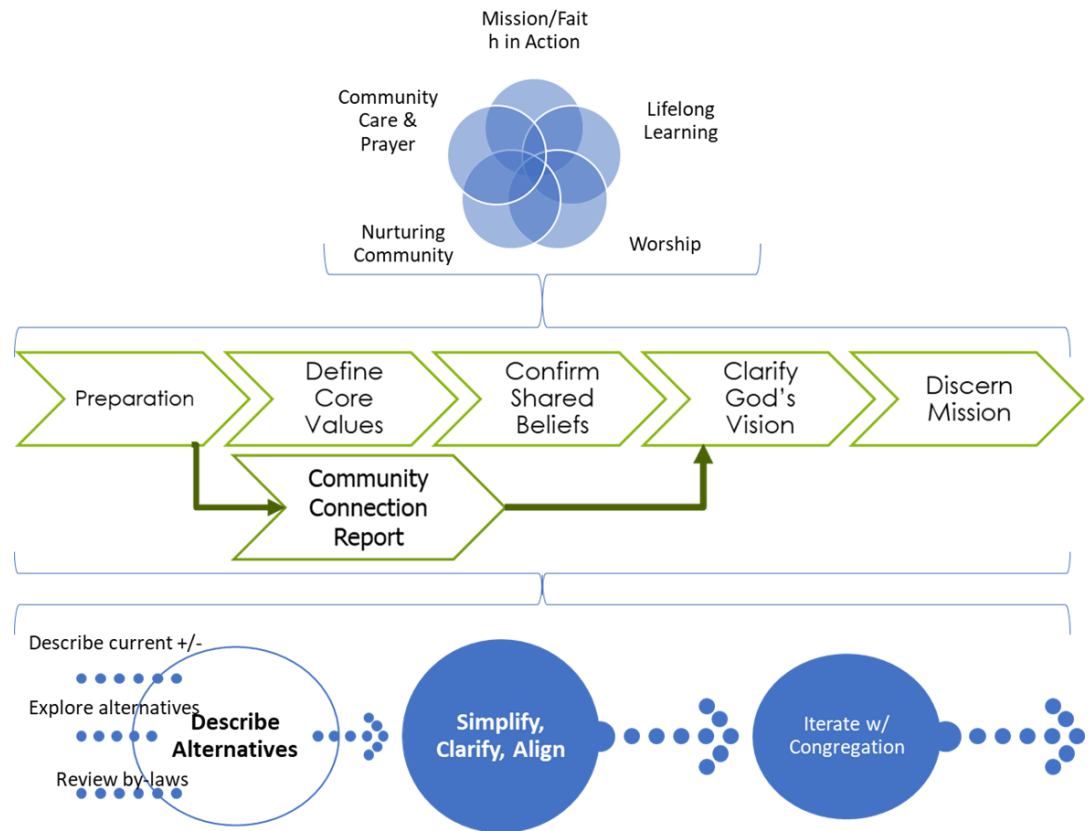
3. Empower, encourage, and inspire lifelong learners of the way of love



To Summarize

Vibrant community and impactful, sustainable ministry flows from intentional reflection and deep listening to where God in Christ through the Spirit is leading us today.

Simplifying, clarifying and aligning structure can speed decisions, reduce confusion, and frees us to focus more on ministry and mission.



V. Next Steps & Actions

Closing Prayer

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, Jesus Christ may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. - Ephesians 3:16-21 NRS