

FCCW Statement of Competing Priorities

In seeking to practice our Core Values, we confront a number of Competing Priorities. These are attitudes and habits that hold us back, that keep us from being the church we feel called to be. Chief among these Competing Priorities are the following:

Our High Standards/Perfectionism

We are a well-educated, moderately affluent congregation. We take pride in ourselves as individuals and in our church as a “flagship” of our association. We want things done just so; we can be critical when they do not meet our high standards. Our tendency to judge manifests itself as criticisms of church music, of one another’s performance of church responsibilities, of ideas for new programs, and so forth. While high standards can be admirable, perfectionism is harmful. As Richard Rohr reminds us, “The demand for the perfect is the enemy of the good.”

Care and Maintenance of the Church Facility

We are blessed with an iconic New England church situated on scenic Woodstock Hill. Our sanctuary is tasteful and understated; Harrison Hall is large and functional; our downstairs open area is ideal for church dinners and Scouts and our Community Kitchen, and our kitchen is commercial grade; our library, downstairs classrooms, nursery, and church offices are all nicely appointed. The problem is that our church facility, expanded in 1991, was designed for a larger congregation. Maintaining it is a drain on the resources of our present small congregation. We expend much of our finances and energy on upkeep rather than on outreach, on repairs and maintenance and cleaning rather than on ministries and faith formation.

Yankee Pragmatism

We are task-driven, more Martha than Mary. We are oriented toward immediate physical needs, toward personal and institutional responsibilities. This practical orientation often takes priority over more interpersonal and spiritual concerns. Sometimes we are not as welcoming as we might be; sometimes in fulfilling our various responsibilities we unintentionally neglect the feelings of others.

Difficulty Assuming Frames of Reference other than our Own

Like people everywhere, churched and unchurched, we experience life as separate human beings. Each of us is consumed with our own concerns, our own perceptions and thoughts, our own individual points of view and opinions, shaped as they are by our own personal histories. While we should not blame ourselves for our inherent subjectivity—it comes with the territory, so to speak—we do need to balance it with the awareness of a larger reality full of other human beings and living creatures and nature and Spirit. We need to be able to see things from other points of view, to be able to walk in someone else’s shoes. If we are to be peacemakers in our community and the world, we will need to meet others who disagree with us and engage them in meaningful dialogue. Such dialogue requires that we be able to imaginatively project ourselves into frames of reference other than our own.

How Can We Do Better?

Naming these “competing priorities” is a first step in mitigating their ill effects. Naming and recognizing them in ourselves, individually and collectively, is a path forward. These tendencies run deep, however. From time to time, we will need to remind ourselves of them, gently and lovingly. When our pursuit of perfection causes harm, for example, we will want to remind ourselves of the good that is happening among us. When we forget that our point of view is not the only one, we should remind ourselves that others may see things differently, and so temper our words and our emails accordingly. This is the work of peacemakers. It can be done by all of us—from the pulpit, during congregational meetings, at board and committee meetings and other gatherings.

11_10_23