

First Congregational UCC Visioning Event January – April 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Visioning Process is an intense, multi-session gathering involving congregational stakeholders in dialogue to jointly discern the future mission priorities of the church. The process asks the congregation what is their purpose and what is their why? It challenges the congregation to assess what they are doing to live into God's economy, addressing poverty in all its forms by using their assets for mission. The Visioning Process helps a congregation understand its needs, while discerning and determining how to meet those needs. The goal of the process is for the congregation, by consensus, to develop a list of mission priorities. These mission priorities will form the basis for strategic planning for the congregation over a one- to five-year period.

First Congregational UCC leadership and members participated in such a process, as led by UCC Church Building & Loan Fund Lead Regional Mission Interpreter (LRMI) Jill White, via Zoom, January – April 2024.



THE PROCESS

Module 1: Information Gathering Wednesday, Jan. 24 and 25

The Visioning Process begins with gathering information from church leaders and members. Two Information Gathering Sessions were held, one on Wednesday, January 24 and the second on Thursday, January 25. Both sessions were held via zoom.

The Information Gathering session began with Jill White, Lead Regional Mission Interpreter, UCC Church Building & Loan Fund, discussing the importance of knowing their church's why – knowing what they were doing to deploy their assets for mission and live into God's economy. Following this presentation, those in attendance were divided into small groups and were asked to discuss a series of 10 questions addressing vision for the congregation over the next 1 - 5 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 could the church do to strengthen and expand its ministry (independent of specific programs)?
5. What does the church need in a facility to carry out its mission?
6. What resources should the church be providing its members?
7. What resources should the church be providing the wider community (non-members)?
8. How could the church use its current resources better or differently?
9. What are the top three needs in your community?
10. What do you believe God might be calling you to do as a congregation?

The small groups were asked to consider these questions individually and as a group. One person from each group was asked to record all responses. Members shared generously and openly. Numerous ideas and responses were provided. At the end of the small group sessions individual questions were answered and next steps addressed.

Prior to the Information Analysis session on February 7, Jill sorted all individual question responses from each small group and compiled them into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheets of sorted responses were emailed back to all participants planning to attend this session.

Information Analysis Session: Wednesday, February 7

Church members and leaders gathered for the Information Analysis Session held Wednesday, February 7. During this session, participants, working in small groups, reviewed the visioning question responses looking for common themes or topics which occurred across all question responses. Each group was instructed to identify 3 – 5 common themes. Following the listing of common themes, a rich and thoughtful discussion was held during the development of the mission priorities or ministry areas (hereafter referred to as ‘mission priority’).

From the numerous concepts presented, the following mission priorities were agreed upon. Concepts placed within each priority are listed below as well (note: number assigned to each priority does not reflect level of importance):

Mission Priority #1: Social Justice/Reaching out/Community Outreach

- How we reach out to campus, Service in the community, Outreach (external) Community Outreach
- College students
- Services to those in need – homeless, hunger, mental health
- Helping existing programs in the community
- Environmental impact/climate change

Mission Priority #2: Connections & Relationships

- Socialization and intergenerational
- Fellowship and engagement within current membership

Mission Priority #3: Faith Formation and Education

- To help sustain us and prepare us for service
- Worship service, programming, intergenerational connections, relationship building, need to support our staff
- Youth education and young family connections – youth and children
- Adult education and spirituality
- Inreach (internal) – member support
- Music

Mission Priority #4: Governance

- How we organize ourselves, governance
- Coordination of efforts across all ministries
- Organizational review and development - staff

Participants also discussed that communication permeated all of the mission priorities and should be considered across all priorities in future planning.

Following the development of mission priorities, working again in small groups, a mission priority number was assigned to each of the visioning question responses. While assigning mission priority numbers, participants noted which responses were comments, which did not fit into any of the mission priorities, and which needed to be placed in a 'Parking Lot' for later consideration.

Responses to Questions 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 were not assigned to mission priorities and these responses can be found in Appendix A. All responses to Questions 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 can be found in Appendix B.

Following the session on February 7, the responses were sorted into their assigned mission priorities and a new list, or 'ballot' created. Only those responses to which a mission priority number was assigned were included on the ballot.

The ballot was returned to participants. Participants were provided instructions on the process for voting during the February 7 gathering and instructions were also provided with the ballot. Participants were instructed to vote on the 3 items within each mission priority they felt were most important for the church to implement or address. Thirty-eight completed ballots were returned to Carole. Voting outcomes were presented at the February 28 Understanding Context session.

Assignment of mission priorities to the visioning question responses, as well as the outcome of voting, can be found in Appendix C and D respectively.

Top Vote Receivers in each Mission Priority

The table below reflects the top vote receivers in each mission priority. Items not reflected in the two tables below can be found in the table in Appendix D.

| MP#1: Social Justice/Reaching Out/Community Outreach | VOTE |
|--|-------------|
| Social Justice Focus, build relationships in the community, we should be known as the church that works on X. Host talks and programs, speakers, TED talk so adults are curious, engaged, topics that makes one think, i.e., Race, Environmental, Social, Economic aspects | 10 |
| Work with the other organizations who already specialize in homelessness, hunger, addiction, mental illness. We can provide support with volunteers and money. They can lead the effort | 10 |
| Creation Care Team/FCC's environmental ethic - increase visibility, Connect/make available resources of / identified by team to members/community, Fun environmental activities – experience with a green lesson (Adult, Intergenerational, Family, Youth) | 9 |
| Sponsor more mission work for youth, especially when they travel and have a chance to expand their perspective of the world beyond La Crosse and Wisconsin. Traveling together also builds connections among the kids. | 6 |
| Provide a Mental Health Counselor with office space at church | 6 |
| MP#2: Connections & Relationships | VOTE |
| Kid/Family friendly activities (breakfasts, trampoline, childcare-available activities, parents' night out) - ways to connect your families with each other, improve communication of available activities to members/friends of FCC (less active as well as active) | 15 |
| Create small group opportunities so church attendees can get to know each other i.e.: neighborhood gatherings, home dinners etc. | 9 |
| Membership- planning events, intergenerational events, i.e., Trivia | 8 |
| More Intergenerational events | 7 |
| Volunteer opportunities in larger community - create opportunities, communicate opportunities to FCC members, convey availability of opportunities (such as a web page or news feed) | 7 |
| MP#3: Faith Formation and Education | VOTE |
| Current- Youth program and JAM keep feeding these programs. And building for growth and engagement. They need additional support; current education leaders cannot do it all. | 16 |
| Adult Education - find topics that are relevant to members and larger community; survey/focus groups to ascertain relevance | 11 |
| Alternative worship options— contemporary, different opportunities styles formats, respect how people learn and interact and styles. Different Modality is the word we settled on | 10 |
| Full faith formation within the church community sustains involvement and engagement | 6 |

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Continue to grow Christian Ed programs i.e.: pay attention to them, adequately fund them, plan programs that engage kids. | 6 |
| MP#4: Governance | VOTE |
| Create a culture of fun/enjoyment/joyfulness across all volunteer activities, including especially committees/ministries - Reduce red tape - / time needed for governance (continue the push by former Moderator Steve Mieden) | 21 |
| More volunteer and staff support to Pastor Laura with her engagement with kids | 16 |
| Fill current vacancy for Faith Formation person | 14 |
| Stop the Silo approach to Issues. Weave issues and themes through education, social justice and mission, finance, as an example. Environmental , care for God’s creation, teach about God’s creation, support Solar investment, pay for it and it crosses ministries | 12 |

Upon assessment of the votes, it was apparent that there were several ‘like responses’ around common concepts or themes. These ‘like responses’ were sorted together, and an updated voting outcomes table provided (below). The concept into which a response was categorized is noted in the far right column, and votes combined to reflect a total vote, or pooled vote. The tables below are truncated and the full compilation of votes can be found in Appendix D. No clustering of votes for MP #4 Governance was required, hence the votes as reflected in the tables above did not change.

| MP#1: Social Justice/Reaching Out/Community Outreach | VOTE | TOTAL VOTES | THEME |
|--|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Work with the other organizations who already specialize in homelessness, hunger, addiction, mental illness. We can provide support with volunteers and money. They can lead the effort | 10 | 24 | Partnerships/ Working with other organizations |
| More and different involvement with programs outside of our church that we often support financially but don’t develop personal relationships that result in bringing new people to our church i.e.: New Horizons, Habitat for Humanity, Homeless shelter etc. | 5 | | |
| Establish more partnerships with community organizations that already specialize in charity work like hunger and homelessness. | 5 | | |
| Improved engagement with WAFER, Habitat, etc. - support/facilitate FCC members in their engagement | 2 | | |
| Support outside agencies involved in working with lonely/food/housing insecurity etc. | 2 | | |

| | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Creation Care Team/FCC's environmental ethic - increase visibility, Connect/make available resources of / identified by team to members/community, Fun environmental activities – experience with a green lesson (Adult, Intergenerational, Family, Youth) | 9 | 14 | Creation Care / Environmental Justice |
| Environmental stewardship | 2 | | |
| Reduce carbon footprint | 2 | | |
| Increase creation care activities i.e.: outdoor programs. | 1 | | |
| Provide a Mental Health Counselor with office space at church | 6 | 10 | Mental Health |
| Provide office space rent free for several counselors to provide mental health services for members and ? the community. Example of a program in Colorado with this model; fees are on a sliding scale and the congregation makes up the difference to provide a livable salary for counselors. | 4 | | |
| Social Justice Focus, build relationships in the community, we should be known as the church that works on X. Host talks and programs, speakers, TED talk so adults are curious, engaged, topics that makes one think, IE Race,, Environmental Social, Economic aspects | 10 | 10 | |
| MP#2: Connections & Relationships | VOTE | TOTAL VOTES | THEME |
| Kid/Family friendly activities (breakfasts, trampoline, childcare-available activities, parents' night out) - ways to connect your families with each other, improve communication of available activities to members/friends of FCC (less active as well as active) | 15 | 23 | Families |
| Connecting Young families | 3 | | |
| There seems to be a missing demographic of members since Covid, the in-between ages between young families and the older generation. Consider a program to reach out to them, inviting them to return. | 3 | | |
| Family networking opportunities, such as fun & meaningful family activities | 2 | | |
| Membership- planning events, intergenerational events, i.e., Trivia | 8 | 16 | Intergenerational events |
| More Intergenerational events | 7 | | |

| | | | |
|--|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| More intergenerational events - advertised outside in community | 1 | | |
| Create small group opportunities so church attendees can get to know each other i.e.: neighborhood gatherings, home dinners etc. | 9 | 9 | |
| MP#3: Faith Formation and Education | VOTE | TOTAL VOTES | THEME |
| Current- Youth program and JAM keep feeding these programs. And building for growth and engagement. They need additional support; current education leaders cannot do it all. | 16 | 18 | JAM |
| Anything that will help with JAM (Elementary program) | 2 | | |
| Alternative worship options— contemporary, different opportunities styles formats, respect how people learn and interact and styles. Different Modality is the word we settled on | 10 | 17 | Worship |
| Different worship styles in different places | 3 | | |
| Expand our worship to new places e.g., in the outdoors with those on hiking trails | 3 | | |
| Discussion (not really a desire) about a more modern worship service. There is support for the traditional approach and predictable structure, but guest speakers and special music are appreciated. | 1 | | |
| Continue to grow Christian Ed programs i.e.: pay attention to them, adequately fund them, plan programs that engage kids. | 6 | 13 | Christian Ed / Intergenerational |
| Grow intergenerational activities i.e.: Lenten and Advent Fairs, trivia night, coffee hour post church service, mission trips. | 4 | | |
| Christian Education - Intergenerational programs, family friendly | 3 | | |

Understanding Context Session:

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Church members and leaders gathered February 28 for the third module of the visioning process. The session began with an overview of activity since the February 7 session, including review and discussion of mission priorities and voting outcomes. Refer to the tables in the previous section (Information Analysis) and Appendix D.

Understanding context is important to the church's mission and purpose. The church needs to ask what transformation it is seeking to make or what impact it wants to have in the community, and to what ministry is God calling it. Therefore, in order to determine if the church's mission meets the needs of the community, the church must understand its context. To this end, session participants were introduced to data generated through MissionInsite, a community analysis tool.

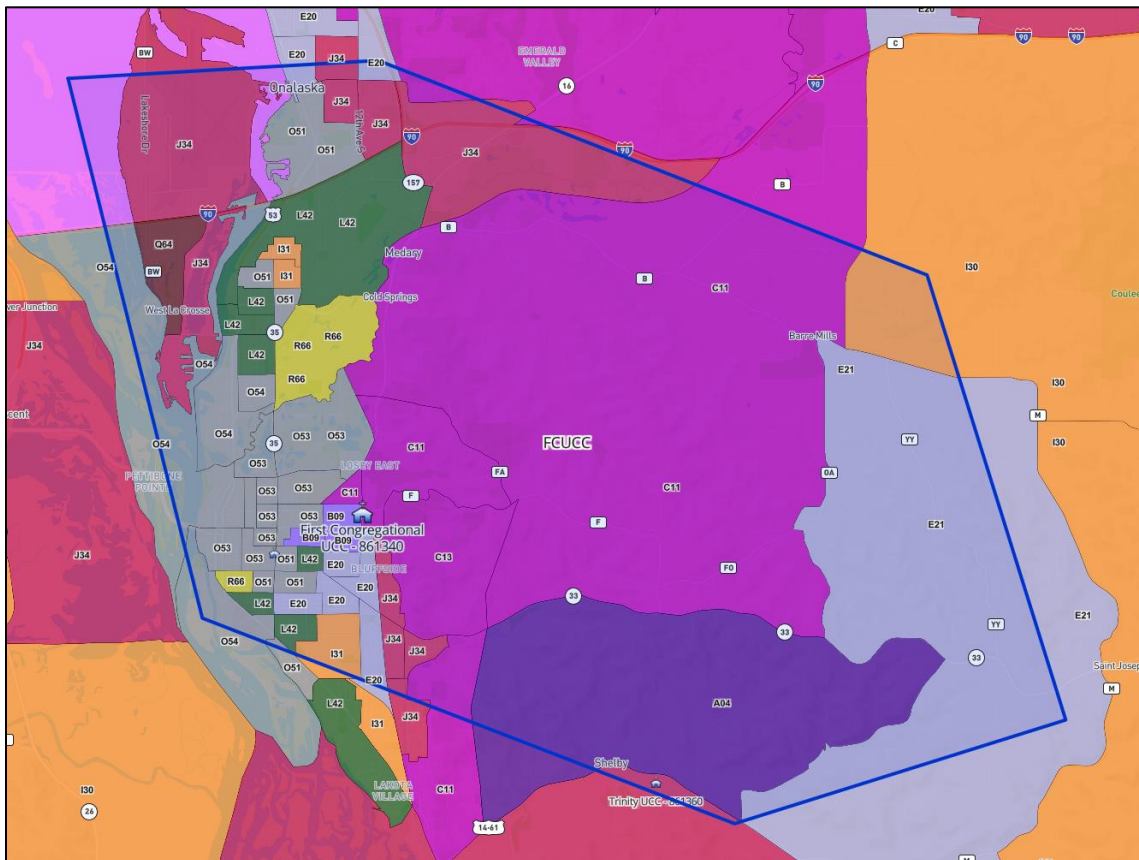
The study area for generating the demographic data was defined by 6 towns/cities: La Crosse, Shelby, Greenfield, Campbell, Onalaska, and Medary. Three MissionInsite reports were generated: ExecutiveInsite, MinistryInsite Priorities and ReligiousInsite Priorities. These reports can be found in the Google drive "MissionInsite Reports and Resources" folder. Additional information has been provided in the Google drive "MissionInsite Reports and Resources" folder to help with the interpretation of the data. Please be in touch with Jill should further assistance be needed or desired for interpreting the data in these reports. An image of the study area can be found below:

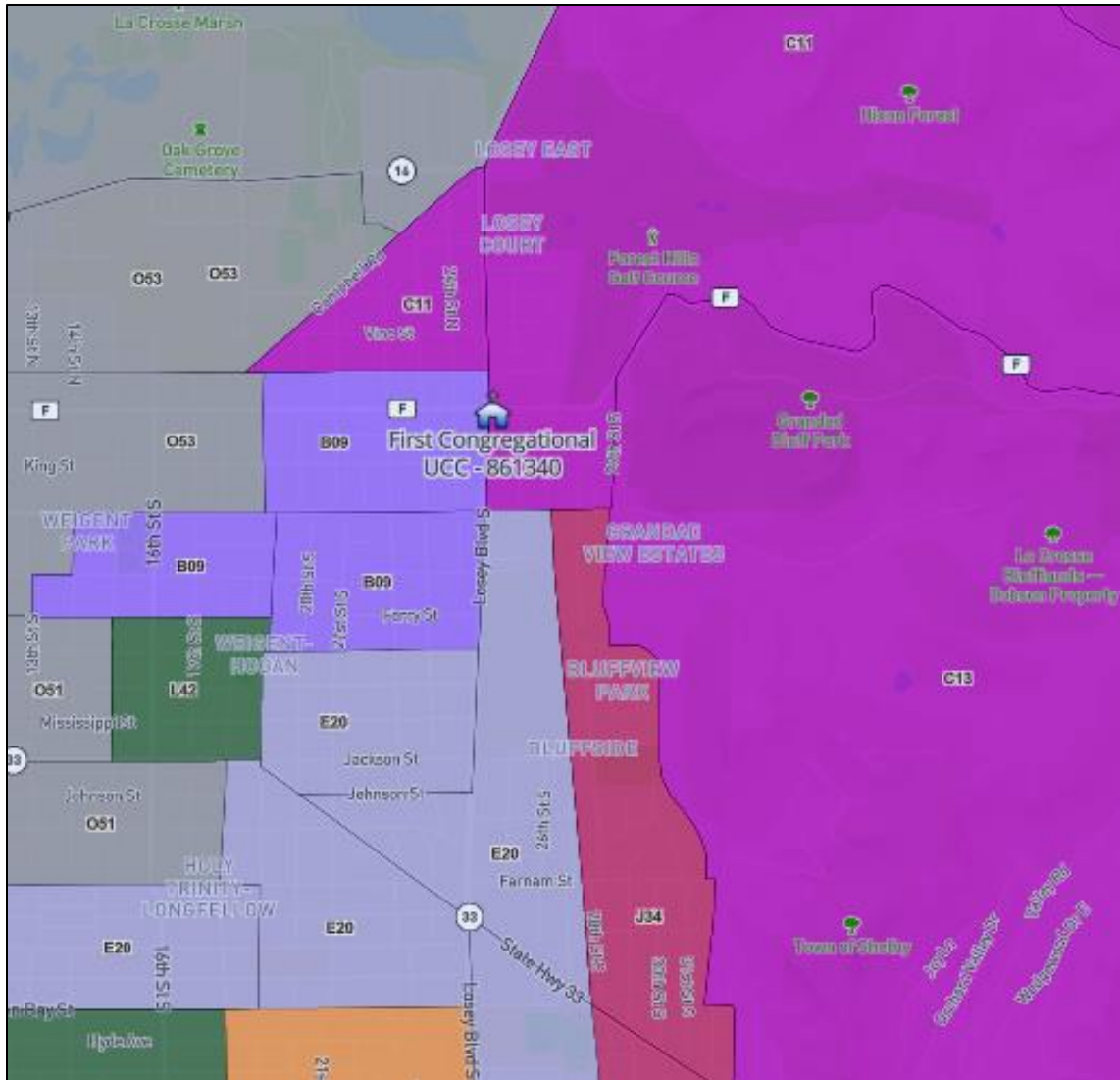


Time was spent reviewing two of the Insites contained within the ExecutiveInsite report, and how this data might be used for identifying ministry opportunities. Data in these reports will be helpful in drafting the strategic plan and developing an approach to community outreach as it relates to the mission priorities.

Contained within the ExecutiveInsite report is data providing the household types or lifestyle segments that can be found within the study area. These households are called MOSAIC segments, and the MOSAIC profiles, which provide a snapshot of the household segment, and Mission Impact Guides, which describe a household’s ministry preferences, were introduced. Two household types in the church’s immediate community were used as examples for interpreting and using the data contained within the Mission Impact Guides. MOSAIC Profiles, MOSAIC Group Summaries, and Mission Impact Guides for 10 household types within the study area (10 most predominant) can be found in the Google drive “MOSAIC Profile Information and Resources” folder.

The first graphic below represents the study area and the predominant household groups/lifestyle types (MOSAIC Profiles) within. The second graphic shows the household groups/lifestyle types in the churches immediate vicinity.





Strategic Planning Session:

The Strategic Plan Writing Team (SPWT) attended the Strategic Planning Session on April 17. During this session, the process for drafting the Strategic Plan of Implementation was reviewed and recommendations made on how the team might proceed.

