

Interim Report- Team Response

George Meier has offered us a thorough and invigorating Interim Report. We are grateful for all it contains, excited about the next steps, and ready to move ahead. The report includes a number of observations and suggestions for this congregation as we move forward from the Interim time. As the Leadership Team, we have reviewed this report and would like to offer some reflections on its implications for our future. The report has much to offer and suggest, and we see our response for the immediate future as responding by focusing our work together in three specific areas: Leadership and Vision, Church Identity and Functioning, and Long Range Staffing. Most of our responses correspond in some way with the “Summary of Recommendations” in the Interim Ministry Final Report (IRFP).

Leadership and Vision

The Interim Ministry Final Report (MFR) notes that to move forward, our church needs to be able to articulate and own its vision- its sense of God’s call. That vision will strengthen us to face the clear challenges we see ahead of us. We see the need to move forward in the fall with conversations regarding the sense that our vision is “**taking Love, to hard places.**” We are eager to work with the congregation to explore ways these words can capture our sense that we can reach out with God’s love to tackle some of the most difficult issues confronting our world. We as a congregation also need to work over the next several months to clarify specific areas where we are uniquely called to that ministry.

In the midst of this vision we also continue to face some very specific internal challenges. These challenges include declines in membership and worship attendance, current stresses being experienced by families around Christian education, and no clear active way to reach out to those in our community for whom this church could be a spiritual home. The Leadership Team sees a need to focus in these areas over the next several months as we move forward.

The IMFR also suggests some significant work in the area of “transformational leadership.” As a response, we propose the following areas of focus:

- increasing clarity on what Team Leadership is at UCUC, and how it is currently functioning. This includes moving forward with
- evaluating and streamlining the ways we work together, with the goals of both strengthening ministry leadership on all levels, and increasing efficiency. This includes significant support for lay leaders as they move into more transformational leadership roles.
- finding an open, flexible way of doing strategic planning. As the report says, we need to “help members and friends catch excitement for being changed, gifted, called, equipped and sent.”

- eliminating the Head of Staff Clergy Role as it currently functions and redistributing those functions.
- helping our congregation establish and support an effective Pastor Parish Relations Committee.
- charge the Church Council with a central, direct role in evaluating the Leadership Team, with clear performance goals and evaluation criteria.

Church Identity and Functioning

The IMFR notes the hard work that has been done on our Identity Statement and the value of that work as we look to our future. It also notes the need for us to gain greater clarity regarding current environmental realities, and how those realities might shape our future. We see the need and opportunity to move forward in the following areas:

- helping church leaders understand our Identity Statement, while also doing the intentional work we need to accomplish in order to stay in touch with congregational realities as understood by members, those on the fringe and those in our community.
- strengthening our Communications Board and our website as a way to strengthen our connections with our community. We would like to see the church begin now to capitalize on the opportunity we will have to reach out when John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar comes to our church in February. We also would like to make sermons more widely available and develop other tools to help the congregation have the resources it needs for its own spiritual growth. Some examples include a regular “Pastoral Blog” in response to crucial issues of our day and stronger connections with Interfaith Radio.
- undertaking a serious study of music and worship in our congregation as we consider ways to expand our worship offerings. This would include addressing the current intergenerational worship design and education program in a way that remains faithful to our vision of education and worship for all, and also takes seriously the needs of parents and families. As the IMFR notes, we are blessed with a healthy number of children and families in our congregation, and we need to continue to strengthen our ministry there. In addition, since worship has not been directly addressed in the interim period, we now need to focus some energy there. This includes opening ourselves to questions of the number of services, types of services, structure of services and purpose of services, addressed as an outgrowth of the vision process.
- engaging in conversations about issues of size and structure in our church, in a way that takes into account our vision. This would also include a discussion of how the Leadership Team relates to boards and committees. (Note for example the observation in the IMFR that “Often, church boards feel most connected to the

church and have a high self-esteem when the clergy take an active part in Board work. (*However*), regular attendance and participation by clergy is indicative of a *pastoral size church to program size church*.” (Italics added) The report then suggests, “The church should consider changing the way clergy relate to boards, committees and task groups. . . . Clergy should clear barriers to effective board work, equip and train board members, and keep an eye on the way environmental factors may affect the board.”

- continuing to deepen our understanding of environmental realities as described in the IMFR.

Long Range Staffing

Staff positions are created and sustained to serve the needs of the church and to enable the church to move towards the goals it has and the work that God is calling us to. The staffing implications of our vision and our moving into the future have been well articulated and supported in the IMFR and the Long Range Staffing Task Force report. We are excited about these possibilities. They include:

- Creating a Church Administrator position to work with the clergy as part of the Leadership Team. This will provide us the gifts we need to lead our vision and to provide effective management for our church and its programs.
- Creating an Administrative Assistant position to help manage the work of the Leadership Team in a way that maximizes ministry.
- Creating a Facilities Manager position that allows us to continue to use our building and facilities for ministry in our congregation and our community.
- Some shifting of current functions to be more efficient and effective in supporting the church’s programs.

We are certain that the work and justifications contained in the Long Range Staffing Task Force report are an excellent articulation of the staffing needed to help us as staff and congregation move into the future with commitment, energy and purpose.

We are excited, energized and challenged by the interim work that we have done in this last year, as congregation and leadership. We are convinced that God is calling this church to great things, and that we have a responsibility and privilege to respond fully and faithfully. We are ready to move into the time of implementation and new beginnings as we focus on all that lies before us. We are certain of God’s presence in this journey, and eager to embrace that call and to be about this ministry. Thank you for the ways that you will pray and work for the mission that lies before us.