



UNIVERSITY CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



Our Vision¹: taking² Love³ to hard⁴ places⁵

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¹ These words were proposed last summer by the Leadership Team as a beginning point for our congregation's conversation about God's call. These words are designed to give wings to our covenant and to be faithful to our history, as well as to focus our response to God's call into our future. So we are trying on these words together, as we think and pray about our ministry.

The words have already prompted much deep theological reflection. Some of those thoughts are summarized below. We are eager to continue to gather comments and talk about our sense of our ministry together and its connection to these words throughout the next several months, so that we can affirm our sense of call at our congregational meeting on April 28, 2008.

² There has been good conversation about our role in God's work. We have affirmed that we are called as a congregation to live out our faith. In fact, the desire to be faithful disciples, putting our words into action, motivates much of what we do together here.

On the other hand, to "take" God's love, some have suggested, focuses the attention on what *we* do. So we need to remind ourselves that the grace of our faith is that it is God who comes to us, bringing love. In fact, many have said that their experience has been that they have not taken, but *found* love, even in hard places in their lives. Others say go even farther, saying that actually, love has found them.

Each of these comments reflects a profound theology that carries a sense of gratitude that surrounds and grounds our faith. So the question of what the verb should be at the beginning of this statement has been vigorously discussed. We look forward to more conversation.

³ Love, as spoken in this statement, refers to the scriptural affirmation that "God is Love." There is a strong sense of the power of Love that our congregation knows and sees as the heart of any expression of mission. We are convinced that we have experienced God as Love and appreciate the open sense of the capitalized word, which is welcoming of all- believers, seekers and doubters. All agree that naming "Love" as at the heart of our life together is right.

Some have suggested that we ought to be more specific and say it is "God's love" that is at the heart of our faith. Some ask if the love we are speaking of can be more clearly seen as Christian love or the love of Jesus.

⁴ We are a congregation that loves a challenge. And we are also a congregation that has a history of leadership in being courageous enough to bring love to take love into our willingness to tackle hard issues and to take significant risks for the sake of the gospel of Jesus. Because we are a large congregation with many resources, we can be leaders in these areas.

Yet as we reflect on these words together, we want to be sure we have not missed the joyous places where we take, find, experience and are carried by Love. We want to be sure we are also expressing our joy.

⁵ We recognize in this statement that there are many hard places where love needs to blossom. Some are within us; some are in our community and in our world. The congregation has found in these words a call to be serious about both the inward journey of spiritual formation and the outward journey of cooperating with God's purpose in the world. We recognize that this statement speaks to worship, parish care, and spiritual nurture, as well as social action, mission, and justice and outreach

Some have asked, by saying we are "taking Love to hard places," are we somehow inferring a judgment on those who are not a part of our congregation? Would someone who is not a part of this congregation feel that they have been labeled a hard place? All of these rich questions have been part of our dialogue about these words of our vision.

⁶ The "Comma" ties us with the United Church of Christ, reminding us that we worship a living God. We believe in God's continuing revelation. We always have. When the Pilgrims set sail for the new world in 1620, their pastor, John Robinson, told them: "The Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His holy Word." Translated into a 21st century idiom, we believe that God is still speaking, (and we never place a period where God has left a comma). Our United Church of Christ has been called the "early" church, because we're usually among the first in addressing important issues facing our society and in taking bold positions that challenge the status quo. That's because we believe God continually calls us into new ministries of love, justice, and inclusiveness. The roots of our faith are over two thousand years old. But our thinking is not. We are a seekers' church. Our worship doesn't exclude questions and explorations. At our best, we seek to include anyone and everyone who wants to listen for the voice of the still speaking God. The comma reminds us that no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome in the United Church of Christ.

