



What It Means to be a Leadership Church

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University Congregational United Church of Christ is a richly blessed community of faith. Through a willingness to speak boldly about the gospel of Jesus and a faithful commitment to living out God's call, we have become a voice for progressive Christianity in our community, in our denomination, and beyond. We have also been a welcoming home for those looking for a place where they can come as believers, seekers or doubters and find a sense of welcome.

As we have moved forward from our interim time, the path before us has opened up in wonderful ways. Though we still have some discerning work to do, we are clearly on our way into the newness that was the promise of our interim time. Already we hear the echoes of folks catching the vision of "taking Love to hard places," and whatever the final words of our vision become, it is clear that God is moving among us.

So we celebrate the active ministry of this congregation:

- through our conversation and discernment about God's call to each of us and to the congregation
- through our options for faithful education as the Spirit moves among us in classes for children, youth and adults
- through the University Congregational Housing Association who lived out Love in New Orleans and in Washington, as they work with flood victims
- through our Sacred Earth group who continue to help us focus on central issues of global climate change and creation spirituality
- through the strong music ministry of this church and the delight in the ways worship carries us to an encounter with the holy, as our music ministry moves through its own interim time
- through a myriad of other ways that together we know and share the gift of Love – with each other and in the wider community and world

We have all the characteristics of what research reveals make for a vital progressive congregation:

- Spiritually oriented,
- unapologetically liberal,
- heavily involved in community ministry,
- clear focus on social justice,
- anchored in deep meaningful worship which conveys God's presence in the service and in the lives of anyone open to God's spirit.

The key to continued vitality as a congregation is to have a vision that calls, guides, inspires and challenges us. That is one reason we've been working hard to discern God's

call to us and find the words in a vision statement to articulate that call. Another key to continued vitality is a capable staff team structured to manage the diversity of its ministries in a collegial manner. And in this area our congregation has led in a unique and faithful way. Because we have lived for over a decade with a “team” model of pastoral ministry, we know both the rewards and the challenges of a deeply collegial ministry.

Over the last year as we have become more and more clear about our sense of vision as a community of faith, we also recognize that we face some interesting challenges. As a congregation, we are at a “transition” size, between what is called a “program” church of 350 (average worship attendance) and a “corporate” church of 350-500 (again, average worship attendance.) We are using the term “leadership church” rather than corporate church, because we think that term better describes this exciting sense of where we are. Of course all churches are called to lead, but churches our size have some unique leadership opportunities.

- We can be a prophetic voice, rejecting the false gods of society and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.
- We are large enough to take on big challenges and to risk much for the sake of the gospel.
- We can partner with other progressive congregations in our community offer support, comfort and vision to one another.
- We have the resources for strong Sunday morning worship with outstanding musicians and excellent preaching.
- We are also complex and diverse, and our lay leaders are strong, faithful and capable.
- We offer a wide variety of programs and celebrate a broad diversity of ministries in our life together.

Still, in order to live fully into what it means to be a leadership church, we need to adjust our staffing. The Interim Advisory Committee and Long Term Staffing Task Force have helped us consider what we need to move ahead. Their recommendations, affirmed by the personnel board and church council, include continuing with three pastors in a team model, expanding that team to include a church administrator, and providing support staff which both allow that team to lead in a transformative way and help equip the congregation to live out its call in unity and diversity. A full outline of the work of these groups and the details of their staffing proposals will be included in the next issue of *Church and Home*.

We live in “interesting” times. It is a challenge for people of faith to find their way today. We need to continue to be a community that offers a broad and extravagant welcome to pilgrims along the way. We believe that congregational involvement and affirmation of our direction will help move us further toward all that God is calling us to be and to do.