

Report on Talking Circle 4—Mission and Vision

Date of Report 3/12/16

Summary

The final tough tasks of interim transition are:

Step 4 - Mission: defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction

Step 5 - Vision: commit to a new direction

The congregation was offered two (2) talking circles to begin laying the groundwork for writing a new mission statement. Since vision is linked with mission, it was decided to work on these two steps together. Peoples Church has applied to the UUA for a Developmental Minister in 2016. It is hoped the future mission and vision will be completed during the developmental ministry.

The Mission and Vision Talking Circles were held Wednesday evening, 2/24/16 and Sunday morning 2/28/16. Rev. Jeff Briere was the facilitator and Scott Mansfield and Judy Price were the scribes. There were a total of 18 participants at the two meetings.

As people talked during the circles, two themes emerged quickly: growth and social justice. A third theme, church community, became apparent as the notes from the circles were compiled. Church community was generally addressed as a prerequisite for growth and/or a strong social justice presence. The diversity of our members and their views surfaced as a challenge to a new mission and vision. Everyone needs to be on board. We need to establish common ground from which a strong vision and mission can emerge.

Thank you to all the many members and staff who have participated in the tough task interim transition talking circle process! We have worked together to ensure that those interested have the opportunity to meaningfully share our thoughts on change with the congregation and board. We have also provided important information for the congregation and staff to consider as we move forward together.

Vision

Rev. Briere posed several questions to focus the circle:

Where does the church want to be in seven to ten years?

What is the future impact of what we do?

What do we want to be known for?

How would the world be a better place because of Peoples Church?

Themes about vision that developed during the circles:

Growth Theme

- Increasing membership and having more staff would help us accomplish the activities we desire to do
- Does the community want or appreciate anything that we can actually deliver?
- Ideas shared on what people think will encourage growth:
 - Becoming a magnetic church—attracting others to our doors
 - Reaching out to the community to meet identified need(s)
 - Partnering with other organizations and/or groups in town
 - Using the church building every day of the week
 - Welcoming children and youth since they may bring their parents
 - Expanding our west-side presence/welcoming our immediate neighborhood

Social Justice Theme

- Work to create more equitable relationships in Cedar Rapids; addressing needs of persons with low-incomes
- External vs. internal focus was discussed: Do we address individual spiritual needs or does our spiritual path lead to engagement in the world?
- Need to address spirit: work on self, work in church community, and work outside in larger community nurtures our own spiritual growth
- Put principles (e.g., worth and dignity of people) into action in wider community
- Create community leaders
- Work as leader with other faith groups in community to accomplish big issues like hunger and environment
- Growing “church that helps others” reputation
- Common ground that everyone shares: we need a new glue – thirty years ago Humanism was that glue; that’s not the case today
- Can social justice be our new glue?

Church Community Theme

- Promoting active listening and knowing/appreciating others’ stories/strengths as well as our own
- Committing to each other
- Providing safe place to ask and answer questions of spirituality without judgment
- Combining internal groups to work together on services, projects, etc. for better results
- Having a beautiful church
- Building connections between members
- Promoting camaraderie and excitement at church
- Being able to generate our own excitement and not relying on minister

Mission

Rev. Briere posed several questions to focus the circle:

- What the church does?
- Who do we do it for?
- Why we do it?

Consensus emerged in both circles that, whatever the mission is, everyone needs to be on board. Everyone needs to be not only in agreement but actively talking and working the mission. The mission ties everyone in the church together. Example was given of group that does Toys for Tots and works on it all year. We can scale our mission to our resources. Missions can be temporary and can change. Mission can be working on distribution and dissemination of goods (ideas, resources, people, etc.)

People talked about church work we currently do, or have done, or are planning:

- On-Going donations to Linn County Food Bank
- On-Going Paraministry program for members needing pastoral care
- Congregation votes on social justice project (this year it’s health care access, last year it was income equality and we adopted Olivet Head Start classroom)
- Cooks’ Night Out supported families by providing community meal with activities for children and socialization for parents
- Rummage Sale neighborhood outreach: banging on doors, passing out brochures, face to face conversations with neighbors, butterfly affect
- RE Director planning block party for fall

People talked about what we could do to help us decide on a mission:

- Use consumer science methods such as segmentation and targeting as we make assessments (e.g., get map and put pin in it for every member address, inventory member strength, etc.)
- Assess our resources
- Assess needs of our current church population and understanding that people ebb and flow in church involvement during their life
- Assess how different generations approach social action, church, etc.
- Assess how the world is changing/reorganizing
- Assess neighborhood needs
- Assess city needs
- Assess who else is doing what we want to do and can we join them and can we make sure we do not step on anyone's toes
- Make communication plan to keep mission on front burner all the time
- Continue to think and document ideas to be able to share in future conversations

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Mansfield
Judy Price