CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH
VISIONING FOR A FAITHFUL FUTURE
STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY
2013-2020

Approved by the Central Christian Church Administrative Board on October 30, 2013

A Beginning

The Listening Task Force started the full written strategic plan by expressing deep-felt gratitude and appreciation for all who participated in the Visioning for a Faithful Future process and re-emphasizes that here.

This document is a brief summary of the Visioning for a Faithful Future Strategic Plan of Central Christian Church for the years 2013 to 2020. The full strategic plan should be viewed as a living document meant to guide Central Christian Church's progress within eight areas of opportunity through 2020 and should adapt as needed. You are encouraged to read the full plan which contains considerable details. There is much to be done.

The plan was put together over a one-year period. Information was gathered from two previous plans, knowledgeable individuals, church records, written documents, a congregational survey, and focus group meetings. The resultant plan is focused on the operation of Central and does not deal with the acquisition or disposal of properties and the related capital debt. Since those issues were being dealt with by the Trustees and others, it was felt best to focus only on operational matters in the Visioning effort.

The first product of the planning process was the development of a set of values that guides us as a church, a vision statement and mission statement, and the embracement of a welcoming statement developed by the Elders. These important elements will guide Central as the more specific plans are made and implemented. The document which presents all of this as one entire document is reproduced on the following page.

Central Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Founded in 1816 and Continuing Its Ministry in Lexington, Kentucky
Declare this to be a Statement of Who We are and What We are About

Central Christian Church holds the following values as important in giving us direction in who we are and how we act:

Values important to WHO we are:	**Values representing HOW we strive to act with:**
Faithful	Compassion
Inclusive	Integrity
Loving	Love
Community	Open-mindedness
Transforming	Wisdom

Our Vision is that as a Church

We are growing as a diverse and welcoming community that confesses Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the World.[1]

Our Mission as a Church

We affirm, as a welcoming community of faith, that God is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and that we are united with him in the grace of God's Spirit and declare our mission is:

- to be in communion at the Lord's Table and with the church universal,
- to engage in thoughtful reflection on scripture and our understanding of the faith, and
- to celebrate the worth, dignity and gifts of all persons,
- to share God's love with others,
- to seek hope, peace, justice and unity, and
- to live out our faith in Christ's service to all.

As Part of Our Vision and Mission We Issue:

A warm welcome to everyone! At Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we believe God's love is expansive and unconditional and through Jesus Christ God has called us to love one another as God loves us. We welcome believers who seek to journey in faith with Jesus Christ and questioners who have doubts or do not believe. At Central, we honor other holy histories and traditions as we celebrate the worth, dignity, and gifts of every person as a child of God. We welcome all persons into membership who seek to follow Jesus Christ regardless of previous religious affiliation, mode of baptism, gender, race, ethnic background, age, sexual orientation, economic circumstance, family configuration, or ability. Welcome!

A Statement from the Elders of Central Christian Church – 2010

[1] Partially derived from the Preamble to The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

A well-known strategic planning process was used by the Listening Task Force as guidance in its work. An explanation of that process is presented in The Process section of the strategic plan (pp. 5-7 of the full strategic plan). Two important sections of the full plan to which you are directed for the richness of information available are the Our Church (pp. 7-13) and Survey Findings (pp. 13-14). In those sections you will find discussion of some strengths and weaknesses of our church along with critical trends which need to be addressed. Those trends are:

- Declining attendance
- Decline in the number of giving units
- An aging membership
- The declining purchasing power of member financial contributions

Additionally, a number of overall conclusions were arrived at from the information collected, the data analyzed, and the meetings held. Those conclusions are derived from and spoken to in multiple sections of the plan but may be found most concentrated in the Our Survey and Opportunity Areas Plan section of the full plan. In summary they include:

- Central's strengths are the worship service as reflected in the music program and the quality of sermons, Central's outreach programs, the quality of its ministers, the inclusiveness of the congregation to persons of diverse backgrounds and perspectives, its facilities, and the programs for children and youth.

- Over the past decade, the areas where the greatest improvements were reported were in the care for babies; the ministering to children and youth; the ministering to women and men; the support of groups in which people participate; and the training provided for laypersons. The area in which we have seen the greatest decline was in keeping everyone informed of what is going on (lack of communication).

- Areas of the church needing to be strengthened or expanded were communication within the congregation and evangelism to increase membership.

Opportunity Areas Plan

There is much to do in the next seven years at Central. Central's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the eight Opportunity areas were discussed in 24 focus group sessions made up of subgroups of a total 134 persons who participated. The results of those meetings are reported within the Opportunity Areas Plan section of the strategic plan. That section is divided into eight Opportunity Areas underlined below. Under each Opportunity Area, two or three goals were developed, along with an explanation of that goal; the benefits to the individual, the church and the community/world; obstacles to goal attainment; solutions that apply to the obstacles; and action steps for accomplishing the goal. The resulting 20 goal statements with a short explanation of each follow.

<u>Meaningful Worship Experience</u> (pages 15-19 of strategic plan)

Worship Goal #1:
Offer a variety of meaningful worship experiences honoring God and meeting the needs of persons across age demographics (yet consistent with theological perspectives of our church).

Discussion:
There is consensus that our traditional form of worship is deeply meaningful to the vast majority of our congregation, yet it is seen as important to intentionally consider a variety of worship experiences.

Worship Goal #2:
Encourage meaningful participation and energy in worship.

Discussion:
Even though our worship services are deeply moving and thoughtful, constant energy, thought, intentionality and resources must be offered to keep worship dynamic, relevant and transformative.

<u>Strategies for Faith and Spiritual Formation</u> (pages 19-22 of strategic plan)

Faith & Spiritual Formation Goal #1:
In covenant with God and each other, Central Christian Church will expand and nurture a culture of coordinated cooperation among its ministerial staff, lay ministry and leadership to be a more vital community and body of Christ.

Discussion:
This goal focuses on the willingness or ability of congregants to assume a greater responsibility for the operation of the church, in coordination with the ministers and staff. The perceived lack of accountability can frustrate both the congregation and staff and can be an impediment to achieving the church's accomplishment of its mission and this may be solved through an effective coordination as stated in the goal.

Faith & Spiritual Formation Goal #2:
Provide a greater variety of experiences for faith formation.

Discussion:
The discussion about this goal centers on the desire for faith formation classes or programs which reflect the current needs of members and visitors. There is a desire for the congregation to have more input into the topics, format and vehicles available.

<u>Stewardship of Time, Talents and Treasures</u> (pages 22-26 of strategic plan)

Stewardship Goal #1:
Feed people spiritually so that we are full and desire to give.

Discussion:
Central members need to understand stewardship as an act of witness and of spreading the Good News. In its best form, stewardship resembles a 3-legged stool where all three elements (Time, Talent and Treasures) should be represented. While donors freely decide levels they can contribute to each of the three legs, the church as a community of faith, should strive to encourage all to participate so that there is enough of all three to achieve a balanced path forward for Central.

Stewardship Goal #2:
Continuously discern, identify, plan and execute activities that address the needs of Central, to include its individual members, the church as a body, and the community/world.

Discussion:
The focus group concentrating on stewardship felt that the church must identify the needs of the church through careful and constant examination and then establish plans to address and meet those needs. This exercise should include specific activities for individual members, the church as a community of faith, and where applicable, the community and world.

Stewardship Goal #3:
Improve the church's ability to effectively communicate its opportunities and needs to the congregation, keeping it simple and direct.

Discussion:
It is important to openly communicate the needs of the church and the resources required to satisfy those needs. This goal is intended to address good communication techniques as an essential element of good stewardship.

Faith into Action through Outreach (pages 26-30 of strategic plan)

Outreach Goal #1
Communicate Outreach happenings and opportunities to our congregation and community in a thorough and consistent way across all media.

Discussion:
It was felt that Central's outreach is a "best kept secret" in our church and in the community. An important step is making sure everyone is aware of what is being done and is planned to be done in outreach. Better communication of outreach efforts can result in additional volunteers and more funding for outreach programs.

Outreach Goal #2
Be Christ's voice and agent for social and economic justice, as well as mercy.

Discussion:
Central members can be an important proponent of economic and social justice. Important concepts are that outreach should be framed as both mercy and justice, outreach should be conducted with someone rather than for someone, and outreach can provide education about the issues rather than just service.

Nurturing Members (pages 30-34 of strategic plan)

Nurturing Members Goal #1
Establish a nurturing system with excellent communication which includes follow-up on a variety of mechanisms of caring for each other.

Discussion:
Nurturing is seen as having systematic ways of caring for each other. The emphasis is on the development of a system that will accommodate a variety of nurturing activities and programs, as well as encourage better communication, accountability and follow-up. An important aspect of this goal includes nurturing roles as a responsibility of members, not simply an expectation of the ministers.

Nurturing Members Goal #2
Help the church's school age youth enjoy attending church and church events.

Discussion:
Keeping grade school through high school children and youth interested in attending church and church activities is seen as very important to their long-term commitment to the church and building of their faith journey. Offering programs where they have fun is critical to keeping them interested. Worship and Wonder, KidsCentral, KidsSing and Vacation Bible School are excellent programs, however beyond that age youth seem to lose interest and we need to make a concerted effort to overcome this.

Building Community within Central (pages 34-39 of strategic plan)

Building Community Goal #1
Improve communication of community-building opportunities through multiple methods so that people are informed, connected, and have a sense of belonging.

Discussion:
The emphasis of this goal is on the communication of community-building opportunities to the membership. Information needs to be provided concerning existing, as well as new programs and activities. Multiple methods of communication with consistency are critically important – from putting notices in the chimes, to making announcements on Sunday mornings, to utilizing social networking and other electronic communication methods.

Building Community Goal #2
Incorporate the needs of the millennial generation (20s and 30s age group) when planning community-building programs and activities.

Discussion:
The millennial generation, sometimes referred to as Generation Y, are individuals in their 20s and 30s. The future of Central will, to a great extent, depend upon the involvement of individuals and families in this age group. Central needs to determine how to appeal to millennials and how to more extensively involve them in the life of the church.

Building Community Goal #3
Identify the current fellowship opportunities and increase the number, type and participation in fellowship groups and activities.

Discussion:
The types of fellowship opportunities referred to in this goal are after-church lunches and programs; fellowship groups of men, single women, young families; women's circles; groups by age, stage of life, or special interests; small groups (ChristCare); and church picnics and outings. The issue is seen as two-fold: insufficient fellowship opportunities and a lack of communication about and involvement in existing ones.

Attracting New Members (pages 39-43 of the strategic plan)

Attracting Members Goal #1:
As part of a comprehensive Evangelism Program, develop strategies that place emphasis on congregational involvement by building personal responsibility among congregants to reach out to attract new members.

Discussion:
The thrust of this goal on evangelism is on the personal responsibility by members. Attracting new members is ultimately the responsibility of each member by extending personal invitations to friends, neighbors, and people we know or with whom we have relationships.

Attracting Members Goal #2:
Develop a simple and clear statement about how Central, through its ministries, empowers and enhances meaning in people's lives.

Discussion:
The question addressed by this goal is "What does Central offer, in terms of ministries, that bring meaning to the lives of those who attend?" Our ministries such as worship, outreach, Christian education, etc. not only add meaning to our lives and those with whom we come in contact, but also determine how we and others perceive ourselves and the world around us.

Attracting Members Goal #3:
As part of a comprehensive Evangelism Program, improve the church's web presence and use of social media technology with a focus on attracting new members.

Discussion:
There was considerable dissatisfaction with the church website at the time of the focus group meeting. Central is perceived by some as lacking current media technology. Since many individuals searching for a church home seek out information about a church on the web, the goal of improving our web presence is related to attracting new members.

Ensuring Operational Effectiveness (pages 43-47 of the strategic plan)

Operational Effectiveness Goal #1:
Implement clear and effective management of ministerial and support staff.

Discussion:
There is the feeling that the church would benefit from better guidance and organization of both the ministerial and support staff. The church's constitution designates the senior minister as the Chief Administrative Officer; however there are questions of whether he/she can perform all of the key functions of strategic planning, policy setting and systems design, and the management of the staff along with other expectations of a senior minister.

Operational Effectiveness Goal #2:
The ministerial and administrative staff should create an annual operational plan that reflects the strategic plan.

Discussion:
There was discussion about the benefits of each staff member having an annual operational plan to guide his or her work. Having annual operational plans were seen as a way to help staff members remain focused on the church's longer range plans, which can be difficult with day- to-day demands on their time. Operational plans could be helpful in staff evaluations, as there would be more specificity in expectations. Furthermore, by aligning financial resources with plan goals, the budgeting process could be improved.

Operational Effectiveness Goal #3:
Create an effective communication strategy for external and internal audiences.

Discussion:
Both the congregational survey and the focus groups voiced a desire for better communication in all aspects of the church. A weekly communication sent by some means to all congregants is seen as imperative. A comprehensive communications audit which would evaluate what information needs to be communicated, to whom it needs to be communicated, and by what means it would be communicated should be conducted.

In addition to the goals identified in the above Opportunity Areas, there were ideas captured in each session which did not rise to the level of the focus groups having time to process them into goal statements. Please see the last page of each of the above Opportunity Areas in the full strategic plan for those additional ideas.

To read the full Goal Plan for any of the above goals or any other section of the plan, the Listening Task Force urges you to access the full strategic plan on-line at Central's website, or pick up a copy of the full plan at the desk in the Welcome Center on Sunday mornings or from the church office any weekday during normal office hours.

Recommendations for Implementing the Plan

The Recommendations section on pages 1-3 of the strategic presents the "how" of implementing the plan over the next seven years. Those recommendations include:

- the placement of the Values, Vision, Mission and Welcome Statement in prominent locations in our church, on our literature (e.g. bulletins) and on our website,
- the structure and method of accountability which will be needed to help keep the strategic plan from becoming just another document to file away in our church archives,
- who can be contacted for more information about each of the eight Opportunity Areas of the plan,
- the methodology for further developing the eight Opportunity Areas with additional goal plans and how to proceed,
- what to do about important ideas from the focus groups which were not yet formulated into goals,
- timing for a leaders retreat intended to operationalize the strategic plan, and
- how to accomplish education of leaders for developing specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time defined (SMART) goal plans for all goals within all Opportunity Areas.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge all in the congregation who shared their thoughts and insights by completing the survey form, participating in focus groups and more. Members of the staff and congregational leaders shared many articles, web-sites and professional reflections with the Listening Task Force for which we are deeply grateful as they helped ground the work and place it in a broader cultural and theological context. We also recognize work of the members of the Listening Task Force who tried to stay true to the mission of listening to the membership and then developing a plan reflective of our community of faith. Those on the Listening Task Force are: John Zink, chairperson; Lynn Gray; Rick Griffith; Ruth Lawton; Caleb Maas; Brock Marrs; Michael Mooty, ex-officio (Senior Minister); Carolyn Richart; Harry Richart, ex-officio (Board Chair); Kathy Schaefer; Hank Sneed; Paul Warner.