Community Church of Vero Beach
A Strategic Plan for 2019-2021

Report Prepared by John W. Wimberly, Jr.
Congregational Consultant

Fall, 2018

As approved by Church Council on December 17, 2018
and recommended for adoption by the Congregation
Dear Friends,

The Vision 2020 Planning Team was authorized by the Community Church of Vero Beach congregation at our January 2018 annual meeting. The congregation had not undertaken a comprehensive strategic plan since 1999. The 2020 Planning team examined the congregation’s goals for the next few years as we prepare to celebrate our 100 year anniversary in 2024.

The planning team consists of Amy Banov, Chair and the following members: Fritz Spitzmiller, Sharon Richards, Kim Anderson, Janet Dunlap, Brad Lorimier, Courtney Dietrich, Jeff Meyer and Joyce Smith. Moderator, Allison Matsik and clergy Bob Baggott, Dr. Casey Baggott, and Rev. David Johnson are ex-officio members. The process was aided by church planning consultant, Rev. John Wimberly, and is described in this report.

During the planning process, Drs. Bob and Casey Baggott announced their upcoming retirement. While not totally unexpected, this information changes the impact of the planning team’s work as it sets the foundation for a search process to replace our senior minister. It is important to note that the Planning Team had already held multiple focus sessions and established the church’s Purpose Statement and Goals. The strategies to achieve these goals were not yet formulated. As a result of the upcoming change in leadership, the strategies in this report focus heavily on the next 2-3 years of pastoral transition and deliberately anticipate the strategies to be assessed with new clergy.

The 2020 Planning Team is pleased to present this plan to the Community Church congregation for approval and implementation.

God bless this church family,

Amy Banov, Chair
Vision 2020 Planning Team
Community Church of Vero Beach
Consulting Report
by
John Wimberly, Congregational Consultant
Fall, 2018

Introduction

Community Church of Vero Beach is a large, healthy congregation with a vital ministry to its members and the community in which it is located. Founded in 1924, the church is covenanted with the United Church of Christ in mission and service while retaining a non-denominational character in polity and vision. At the close of 2017, the congregation had 1897 members from over 50 denominational backgrounds but over 2500 people who were either members or active in the congregation but not officially members. The congregation receives 60-80 new members annually while suffering the loss by death of 45-60 beloved members annually.

The congregation’s ministry reflects the fact that it is located in a community with a large number of retired people. Many of these individuals are “snow birds” who are in the area only during the winter months. Worship attendance has been steady over the past three years with 1200-1400 attending during the November-April months and 600 during the other months. There are two concurrent worship experiences. One is traditional while the other is multi-media contemporary. The congregation also offers a chapel service early on Sunday mornings.

The financial indicators at Community Church are very positive. The income for 2017 was $3.8 million, with pledged income rising each of the last three years. In each of the last three years, pledges received have exceeded the stewardship goal for the year. Expenses for the past three years have been less than income, producing three years of financial surpluses. During 2016, the church paid down a $958,012 building debt to $105,697 and retired it entirely in January 2017. The church’s limit on this revolving line of credit was $2,999,958 as of December 31, 2017. The church has a financial reserve of approximately $6.4 million, although much of it is unavailable for any use outside the restrictions placed on the funds from their donors.

The congregation’s professional staff includes Senior Minister, Executive Minister and Minister of Mission and Education full-time pastoral positions. Currently, an Interim Minister of Pastoral Care provides part-time support. This position replaced a recent retiree and may return to full-time status in the future. There are two full-time non-ordained Emerging Generations Ministry Associates as well as a part-time Ministry Associate for Spiritual Development. The staff also includes a full-time Director of Music and full-time Associate Director of Music and Organist. The congregation has a full-time Business Administrator, a full-time Director of Development and a full-time Director of Community Preschool.
The Senior and Executive Ministers have announced that they will retire sometime late in 2019 or early 2020. While causing much sadness in the congregation, this was not a totally unexpected event. As a result, Community Church of Vero Beach is in a time of transition as members celebrate the powerful ministries of Drs. Bob and Casey Baggott and begin the search for a new Senior Minister, as is called for in the church’s by-laws. This process will warrant the need to consider whether or not to continue with an Executive Minister position or redesign the current staffing plan. The congregation intends to use a search firm as well as suggestions flowing from the United Church of Christ to assist in a nationwide search for their new pastoral leadership.

Section I  The Strategic Plan for 2019-2021

The planning process was led by a team of lay leaders at Community Church. They hired a consultant to advise them. The Community Church staff was heavily involved. The process began with a retreat in February 2018 in which the planning team and key leaders discussed what God is calling the congregation to do in the next three to five years. They emerged with a consensus Purpose Statement to present to the congregation in focus groups.

Members of the congregation gathered in numerous focus groups to discuss the Purpose Statement. The Planning Team considered their comments and then finalized the statement. The next step involved the Planning Team creating goals that flowed from the Purpose Statement to help the congregation accomplish its purpose. A “Nurturing the Congregation Life Cycle Stages” matrix was developed to highlight the breadth of current ministries, activities and programs (See Appendix C).

In October 2018, the Planning Team met, with staff in attendance, and generated a number of strategies for each goal. Several weeks later, they prioritized the strategies into a smaller subset. With that step, the plan was completed.

The Word Cloud image below was created using all the words written down in the many focus groups that met during the planning process. The larger the word, the more it was used (or a theme associated with it). It is a fascinating way to see what members value at Community Church.
The planning team has made an intentional decision to build on the things members currently love about Community Church, rather than recommend changes in those areas.

When the plan is approved, the congregation’s leadership will recruit small teams for each strategy. Each team will be made up of members who have the specific skill sets needed to implement the strategy. Each team will create a performance measure and timeline for completion for itself.

Moving forward, the teams will report periodically to the congregation’s Church Council about their progress. As strategies are implemented, new strategies will replace them under the goals. This allows the plan to be an evolving document guiding the congregation’s focus in the years ahead. The completed plan is below.

**Purpose Statement**
To be a community of God’s people, who follow Christ’s way, worship in Christ’s name, welcome and love all, serve widely and joyfully, to transform our lives and world by reflecting God’s living spirit.
Vision 2020 Planning Team
Goal Themes & Strategies

Assure institutional infrastructure:
Governance (encourage lay-leadership and participation)
Facilities (provide and maintain for Community Church and wider uses)
Stewardship (insure fiscal longevity)
Staffing (inspiring clergy, appropriate program support)

Narrative: Practice responsible stewardship of the financial, facilities and people resources entrusted to our care so that the mission and God’s purpose for Community Church may be vigorously lived out. Community Church has historically valued and protected our institutional well-being. In response to the upcoming ministerial transition, these strategies have been given additional importance.

Immediate Strategies:

- Appoint Transition Team to coordinate the search and call of new Senior Minister
  - Search Committee
  - Support our staff through the transition time
  - Create team to celebrate retiring clergy’s ministry
  - Welcome and integrate new clergy into church family

- Appoint Task Force within the Church Council to research alternate governance structures and recommend changes
  - Review and modification of Community Church Bylaws and organizational chart
  - Alignment of mission/ vision of boards and teams with Purpose statement
  - Strengthen understanding of church governance—decision-making and policy at leadership retreat or other annual events
  - Encourage multi-generational members to join committees and boards
  - Provide shorter time commitment for lay leadership roles

- Devise long term plan for the fiscal health for Community Church
  - Address endowment funding for long-term needs of the church
  - Strengthen planned giving programs in line with Gift Acceptance Policy
  - Develop “crisis management” plan for “what if” scenarios (What if attendance or membership declines? What if a major economic event hits community? What if a natural disaster occurs?)
  - Align stewardship model with current technologies and generational expectations and trends
  - Create Reserve Funds for Unrestricted Operations and Capital needs
Long Term Strategies:

- Explore increased building utilization
  - Survey facilities for highest and best use (i.e. kitchen, Commotion, Preschool) in connection with space needs
  - Develop short term and long range plans with process for undertaking changes
  - Maintain security
  - Develop Maintenance and Replacement schedule for campus facilities to be supported by Capital Reserve Fund

Support and Nurture our church family
Children, family programs
Pastoral care
Small groups

Narrative: Communicate and share God’s love to those of all ages and circumstance in our church family recognizing that we exist in community with each other. We value and desire social and spiritual connectedness and we recognize the role of Community Church to provide a genuine church family as a meaningful body of Christ.

Immediate Strategies:

- Improve church website to include interactive features
  - Variety of current images, videos, testimonials
  - Giving options
  - Member Directory
  - Events tabs for all ages

- Analyze programs to find a better fit with the schedules of families with kids, members with jobs which will enhance participation
  - Worship and program times and frequency
  - Online options (i.e. recent bulletins, lesson plans, lectionary)

- Establish and promote an accessible “clearinghouse” for all members to identify ways to become more involved with varying levels of time commitment
  - Volunteer recruitment plan
  - Volunteer coordinator position
  - Needs for teaching Sunday school (Godly Play), chaperoning youth trips, Sunday greeters, mission teams, etc.
Long Term Strategies:

- Examine adult educational ministry opportunities with the needs of our members
  - Events, classes, training, lectures, speaker series, trips, workshops
  - Online options, clergy blogs, lectionary previews
  - Community at Community programming
  - Expansion of small group opportunities

- Establish connections between church members
  - Similar non-religious interests (i.e. running group, cooking, book club),
  - Partner organizations, (i.e. health fair), healthcare ministry
  - Singles ministry
  - “Family tree” for intergenerational connection
  - Random acts of kindness

- Identify the unique needs and interests of our older members. Design an outreach strategy to fill one or more needs that uses gift/talents of members instead of staff
  - Connect seniors to each other
  - Caregiving for homebound members; telephone reassurance ministry
  - Support network for adult children of aging parents
  - Expand use the church bus

**Insure consistent expression of our Christian theology**

Sacraments and Worship
Music and Arts
Education

*Narrative: Maintain and enhance the exceptional quality of Community Church’s Sunday worship services, including extraordinary preaching, challenging and timely sermon content, high quality instrumental and vocal presentations and meaningful prayers. Provide continuity of the Sunday experience throughout all church activities and publications. Create environments and opportunities for all ages to learn and deepen our knowledge and understanding of our faith.*

Immediate Strategies:

- Develop a plan to promote and market Community Church’s music and fine arts ministry

Long Term Strategies:

- Evaluate the Sunday morning worship schedule and recommend adjustments or changes which encourage greater and consistent attendance
Communicate our warm welcome and acceptance of all
Embrace diversity
Encourage growth of participation and membership
Focus on accurate messaging and branding in marketing and communications

Narrative: Each week our Sunday worship bulletin and our website proclaim this defining message: “Recognizing the wide welcome offered to all through Jesus Christ, Community Church opens its arms to all. We strive to offer Christ’s wide welcome to all people, regardless of creed, age, race, or sexual identity.” Our congregation’s character is reflective of this welcoming stance. As a congregation of diverse talents, backgrounds and beliefs, we celebrate our desire to be inclusive to all who wish to join us in a line we regularly quote from our founding documents: “There is more that binds us together than separates us in the worship of God.” In keeping with that perspective, and with our denomination’s traditional assertion that testimonies to faith are preferred to tests of faith, we prayerfully consider and thoughtfully and respectfully engage with one another in addressing issues of great significance. We watch together to witness more light and truth break forth among us, as we endeavor to share the unconditional love of Christ with all. In efforts to grow membership and participation, be mindful to respect all viewpoints while encouraging love for ourselves, our family and the greater community.

Immediate Strategies:

- Create a full-time communications and marketing staff position
  - To connect church to the community
  - To connect members to the church
  - Educate members in the use of technology

- Establish a team to connect with minority and interfaith communities
  - Identify music and other events/services that would attract diverse audiences
  - Collaborate with mission projects
  - Welcome use of facilities to minority groups
  - Show up at community events

Long Term Strategies:

- Invite the congregation to participate in creating an interactive artistic work at Community Church (perhaps 100 year anniversary theme, “story corps”, what I love about Community Church)

- Celebrate the small and large “wins” that individuals have during the week in bulletin, testimonial videos, social media

- Collect ideas for attracting new members (purple bracelets, welcome cards, guest Sundays, pen-pal churches, invitations to preschool families)
Reaching out to and aiding others in need

Collective mission programs
Individual service in broader community

Narrative: We are connected to our community and the world, by partnering with people and agencies who are doing extraordinary things to make our world a more just and caring place. ‘The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25:40). Community Church of Vero Beach is actively engaged in effective and meaningful mission work locally and worldwide. Strategies for modifying the structure and funding of our mission outreach model should be addressed after the ministerial transition phase in our church.

Long Term Strategies:

- Establish congregational priorities for serving local, national, and worldwide needs. Prioritize mission target areas (e.g. housing, hunger, education or others).
  - Examine funding structure and increase resources allocated for mission outreach
  - Evaluate the number and type of organizations we support to align with the identified priority target areas.

- Design, incubate and shepherd into existence and eventual independence a new mission venture serving an unmet need.

- Develop ways to engage our members in hands-on mission participation. Publicize and promote opportunities for meaningful service. Incorporate collaboration between ministries, generations in mission service.
Section II    Thoughts on Community Church of Vero Beach

Demographics and Staffing

Community Church is unique with its very large “over 70” age demographic. Nearly one thousand members and active participants fall into this category. Typically, this demographic has high pastoral care needs. In addition to a large “over 70” population, Community Church has 877 members and active participants in the 19-50 demographic. This group is a good size congregation in and of itself as is the 50-70 group consisting of 616 members and participants. In effect, the congregation has three congregations within its body that have distinct pastoral care and programming needs.

The percentage of the church’s budget allotted to personnel is somewhere in the range of 57-61%. The variance depends on whether or not the staff of the preschool is included. Either of these numbers is high when compared with other large congregations. That being said, the seasonal nature of Community Church’s membership may well dictate a higher-than-average staff cost. The congregation increases dramatically in size during the winter months.

To serve the larger winter congregation, it is necessary to carry a large staff year-round. Second, congregations nationwide have less volunteer help available to them than past generations. Therefore, they either have to hire more staff or cut back on ministry. Currently, Community Church has the financial resources to hire staff to do what volunteers might have done in the past.

Given the size and complexity of the demographics at Community Church, it would be wise to do a formal staff redesign once the new Senior Minister is in place.

Pastoral care is an example of how the staffing design needs to be carefully considered. Currently, the senior clergy lead approximately 60 memorial services annually. As a result, other pastoral care responsibilities are necessarily spread out across the staff and within their ministry areas. The church has implemented a “Called to Care” lay-ministry to supplement pastoral care activities. With the current part-time pastoral care associate, is it feasible to 1) meet the needs of such a large pastoral care group and 2) avoid burning out the entire staff? In the consultant’s opinion, the answer is “no.” In the transition ahead, the congregation should consider returning to a full-time, dedicated staff person working on and coordinating pastoral care at Community Church. This hire can best be made once the new Senior Minister is in place. A comprehensive pastoral care approach can then be developed.

Any redesign of the current staffing plan should consider additional retirements and possible turnover that may take place in the coming years, creating a chance to rethink responsibilities in those areas. While it is challenging to find volunteers these days for some ministry tasks, many congregations are using volunteers for tasks such as answering phones, receiving mail, etc. Because of technology, most clergy can now do their own correspondence, keep their own calendars, print documents, etc. As a result, the need for direct support of clergy in the administrative area is decreasing in many congregations. An opportunity exists to rethink the most efficient approach to administrative and support staffing needs.
In a redesign if not earlier, upgrading the communications staff position to full-time should be a high priority idea to consider. In the twenty-first century, there may be no more critical congregational staff person than communications. The church is in the business of communicating the Gospel. In the twenty-first century, this means using state-of-the-art technology and software to communicate. A full-time Communications Director would both 1) help devise a communications and marketing strategy and 2) do the hands-on work of maintaining the website’s content, sending out eblists, working with social media, etc. There is a competitive market for this type of employee. The cost of such a position will not be cheap, but the expense of hiring the right person is worth the benefits that will follow.

A major question that needs to be addressed in the next year will be what to do with the responsibilities of the current Executive Minister. Currently, among other responsibilities, the Executive Minister is the writer of liturgy, the worship designer for most all services, the author of a weekly column in a local newspaper, the primary wedding officiant, officiant of about half of the annual funerals, the overseer of the Community Preschool, a preacher and worship leader, teacher of two weekly women’s bible studies, direct supervisor of the family ministries staff. While the Executive Minister describes herself as a “utility player,” she is, in effect, a Co-Pastor who handles many different assignments based on needs that arise within the congregation’s ministry. This unique arrangement between the Senior Minister and Executive Minister is reflective of the opportunity afforded by a married couple in these positions.

Short term, who will handle these responsibilities after the current Executive Minister retires? Will the congregation need to hire a full or part time person to fill-in until a new staff design is created with the leadership of the new Senior Minister? Are there ways to handle some of the Executive Pastor’s responsibilities by assigning them to other staff? Longer term, will the new Senior Pastor want to do some of the work the current Executive Minister does? Given the presence of a Business Administrator at Community Church, another title and role might well be considered for the duties of the current Executive Minister.

Financials

Community Church of Vero Beach is in solid financial shape. The pledging income has exceeded the annual stewardship goal each of the last three years. Total income has exceeded expenses over the same period. The congregation’s financial reserves are approaching $6.5 million. However, approximately $3.7 million of this money is temporarily or permanently restricted to very well-defined uses. Such funds cannot be viewed as cash reserves.

A standard metric used to assess financial security involves calculating a worst-case scenario: the number of months a congregation can operate without any income. Community Church spends approximately $317,000 monthly. With unrestricted funds of approximately $2.2 million, the congregation could operate without income for approximately seven months. Conservative recommendations for financial reserves are in the range of 12-18 months of operating capital. Community Church needs to build up its financial reserves. The need to
increase the congregation’s financial reserves becomes clearer when one analyzes the structure of funds available for each “operating” and “capital” reserves. $1.5 million of $2.2 million in total unrestricted reserves is the Nigh Vision Fund which is directed by Board of Trustees and can be spent for operations or capital expenses. The Scott Hadley Bailey Fund is restricted to capital building improvements and maintenance; $457,000 is temporarily restricted and $1.3 million is permanently restricted.

Building and Grounds

The congregation has a very large, well-maintained campus with several buildings. Does the congregation have a plan for maintaining the buildings in the future? The best practice for maintaining buildings is the use of Capital Reserve Fund. Every condominium in Vero Beach most likely has a Capital Reserve Fund. Most congregations do not. The advantages of a capital reserve fund are numerous:

- The money invested in constructing the facilities will be respected by ongoing maintenance of the properties;
- The congregation will not have to endure constant fundraising for capital expenditures in the years ahead;
- Those managing the facilities can act promptly when replacements are needed rather than waiting until the needed money is raised.

The congregation would be wise to do the full analysis of the building’s needs over the next twenty years and then create a Fund that is designated as a Capital Reserve Fund to fund solely those needs. This will also reveal how much or little the congregation has in the way of financial reserves for non-building related crises. This is an appropriate task for the congregation’s Trustees.

If Community Church creates and funds (partially in the beginning with annual contributions going forward or fully from the beginning) a Capital Reserve Fund, it essentially eliminates the building as a financial problem in the future. It also allows the congregation to have smaller cash reserves since other financial crises, typically, will be smaller in nature. Most important, it enables the congregation to focus its attention on its passions: nurture and care of our congregation, ministry with youth and children, excellent worship, and missions.
Section III  Being Faithful and Effective as the Church in the 21st Century

21st Century Trends in the U.S. Relating to Church Growth

Many of the older members at Community Church can remember when sanctuaries looked like the one in the photo above in the 20th Century. Too few congregations have adjusted to the fact that realities in the 21st Century are far different. What are some of the key things we need to understand about our current context to be successful in ministry in the 21st Century?

- Fewer and fewer people are interested in the governance systems of our congregations. Their passion relates to serving people in need. As a result, we need to dramatically reduce the size of our governance systems, relying on small teams to do the internal work of the church. Simultaneously, we need to increase the number of opportunities for members to serve Christ and the community with hands-on volunteer mission work.

- Children and youth are doing other things on Sunday morning, especially soccer. As a result, Sunday schools nationwide are experiencing low attendance. Some congregations are beginning to experiment with different models to fulfill our responsibility to teach the faith to our children—on days other than Sundays, through intensive retreats, online, etc.

- Our stewardship models are still built around pledges. However, many young people prefer to give electronically with multiple small donations. Young people donate. Just ask politicians and non-profits who have raised hundreds of millions of dollars from the millennials. We need to create opportunities for young people to give the way they prefer to give.

- Sending money to missions in which the congregation is not heavily involved has little appeal. Linking money with hands-on mission projects is popular.

- Time is more important than money to many people. They don’t lack the commitment of 20th Century church goers. They are over-committed to many different groups in the community. We need to consider this reality when we ask people to volunteer.

- We have five generations active in the church today (Silent, Boomers, GenX, Millennials, and Gen Z). Each generation prefers different ways of communicating (hard-copy newsletters, eblasts, email, texts, websites, etc.). Each generation has different preferences for learning. Congregations need to segment their approaches to Christian education, communication, music, stewardship, etc. to match the preference of the different generations.
Best Practices for Congregations

- Non-Bureaucratic, fewer rules, more policies, more freedom as to how policies are implemented
- Constantly Train Staff and Members
- Externally Oriented
- More empowering, less control
- Transparent/Open/Candid
- Higher Levels of Risk Tolerance
- Highly Focused and Aligned

The tight control from staff, governing boards and committees that was successful in the 20th Century doesn’t work in the 21st Century. We need to create teams to do ministry, make sure the teams are clear about their task, and then give them the freedom to do the work. The role of a governing council is to think strategically about the mission of the congregation and set policies that empower the mission. Management should be done by ministry teams and/or staff.

Learning organizations are the high performers in our time. These organizations are constantly training their staff and members. Congregations need to do the same. Money spent on continuing education for staff and team members is one of the smartest investments we can make.

Congregations that are externally oriented are attracting younger generations. Congregations focused on internal issues are not. This means we need to be focused on creating hands-on mission projects to serve the world.

Transparency is more than a buzz word. It is an imperative in our time. Any and all information about the congregation’s life needs to be readily available to members. Preferably, it is easily found on the church’s website. The only thing exempt from transparency is private, personnel information.

Congregations are inherently conservative in their institutional approach to things. In some ways, this is positive. However, we need to take risks where appropriate. Jesus risked preaching a message that was offensive to some of his neighbors. Paul risked taking the faith into the diaspora. Martin Luther and John Calvin risked challenging the powerful Roman Catholic Church in Europe. We won’t need to take risks of that magnitude. But can we risk re-thinking the type of staff positions we have; how much we invest in communications; and how we do mission work and Christian education. If we are to grow into the 21st Century, such risks will be required.

Research demonstrates overwhelmingly that highly focused organizations that align their resources to achieve a clear purpose are much more effective than those lacking focus. Congregations want to be all things to all people. Our programs pull us in many different directions. In some instances, this is fine. However, for the most part, we need to say “no”
more often to various ministry options, so we can remain focused on the clear purpose we hear God calling us to realize.
### Community Church of Vero Beach Demographics

**AGE GROUPS**

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- Number of Active Men = 1,008
- Number of Active Women = 1,487
- *Age 19 and over*
Appendix B  Financial Information

Total Assets as of 12/31/2017
$20,866,640

- Prepaid Expenses: $53,976
- Cash: $484,967
- Investments - Temporarily Restricted: $5,904,213
- Investments - Permanently Restricted: $56,518
- Property and Equipment, net of depreciation: $14,340,507
- Accounts Receivable: $26,459

Income & Expense

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