

Strategic Planning Report

October 2024



The Visioning Event

Beginning in April 2024, the Zion Reformed United Church of Christ (Zion) began walking a journey of reflection and vision. Jill White, Regional Mission Interpreter for the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund, facilitated an intense, weekend-long meeting involving congregational stakeholders in a dialogue to jointly determine the future mission priorities of the church over the next 1 - 5 years.

Joining us for that 2-day Visioning Event with Jill were 40 members of our congregation who placed multi-colored stickies around the room with our visionary word-dreams. We compiled them into common themes and further compiled them into three areas: Local and Global Outreach, Sustainability, and Member Care.

The Consistory recruited a writing team including Becky Hohman, Kim Ridenour, Mark Shroyer, Megan Shroyer, and Scott Winnette. We prayerfully examined the piles of sticky visionary data points, our collective summaries of vision, and our three principal areas. We respectfully present this pathway forward into our collective vision for Zion. The Gospel of Matthew Chapter 25 conveys Jesus' mission and Jesus' desired mission for his followers. The cloud of visionary statements from Zion Reformed United Church of Christ resonates beautifully with Jesus' view of how we live together.



“...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Zion has a rich history and desires to be in the future a loving, welcoming congregation where abundant and exciting nourishment occurs mentally, physically and spiritually. We hope to provide each other with rich beverages: waters of Holy Spirit, coffees of fellowship, juices of vibrant communion. We extravagantly welcome strangers by making them feel safe and inviting them to join our family. We clothe each other with compassion and dignity. We desire to be present to each other, visiting each other when we are constrained by life's pain and suffering.

Sustaining each other, we plan to grow as a beloved community, a family of Christ, that we may better serve each other and our neighbors. So, as a strong compassionate family, we then pass the food, the drink, the welcome, the clothes, and our presence to our Hagerstown neighbors and our neighbors unto the far reaches of the world.

Zion will grow our community by strengthening our body, caring for ourselves, communicating beautifully and effectively, utilizing and maintaining our buildings and grounds, growing membership, increasing stewardship so that we will be in service, loving our neighbors for decades and centuries into the future.

Churches for decades have been in decline sorrowfully closing all over the country. The COVID pandemic exacerbated the problem, and congregations that were on a slow decline were rapidly extinguished during the isolation. Zion survived, but like most congregations, suffered losses. To recover and to withstand the pressures that are shrinking congregational membership, Zion needs to rebuild, focusing on its infrastructure -- its people, its leadership, its property, its finances, and its partners. We indeed need new members, more disciple volunteers, more leaders, more funds, and new mission partners to thrive into the future. While it may seem Zion's five-year vision is to focus on itself, this is far, far, far from the dream – we are rebuilding and strengthening Zion's congregation for a future of service and outreach.

Celebrating Our Quick Wins

We were delighted to discover that many of the micro-visions presented during the Visioning Event were already being done or can be easily implemented. We realize an important initiative of our visioning is to improve communication within the congregation.

Skill & Interest Forms - Zion maintains all of its ministries through the gifts of the talents and time of members and friends. To aid in recruitment, we are undergoing a Skills and Interest data-gathering process.

Tuesday Night Ministry - Soup Kitchen Changes -In response to evolving needs, we have made some adjustments to our Soup Kitchen operations. Take-out orders have been discontinued or limited, allowing us to focus on serving our guests more effectively on-site.

Nursery Renovation - We are pleased to announce that our nursery bathroom/storage area has been freshly painted!

Youth Events Schedule - Our Christian Education Committee has been hard at work developing a dynamic schedule of youth events for the upcoming year. Stay tuned for the Souper Bowl fundraiser. We restarted Vacation Bible School this year after many years without a summer program for our youth congregation.

Tuesday Night Ministries - Grants for the Soup Kitchen - We have been awarded several grants to support our Soup Kitchen. Grant funding has helped us to acquire additional tables and shelving.

Online Calendar - We have an online calendar to keep you informed about upcoming events and activities. You can now easily stay updated and plan your participation.

In worship we are: Forming a liturgical drama group, expanding our music by exploring a new hymnal, learning new songs and reengaging in the classics, improving our safety with new magnetically locking doors to the Sanctuary, encouraging the use of our main entrance doors.

Serving our neighbors, we are: Inviting neighborhood churches to share in VBS; ever seeking to better reduce food insecurity improving our Tuesday Ministries; adding hygiene items to the Pantry; finishing the refresh of the Fellowship Hall: painted, new lights, HVAC system, new tables, ice machine, carts, freezer and refrigerator; growing the volunteers who help with Micah's Backpack and seeking to increase funding; and hosting the 2nd Annual Resource Fair.

Serving our Members and Friends, we are: Communicating how easy it is to give online to Zion and Zion's Ministries, organizing drivers to provide transportation, providing new ways to pray for each other (Prayer Chain, Facebook Group, Prayer Circles), communicating life events in the Newsletter and Friday What's Happening email. As we expand our electronic communication methods, our newsletters are still being printed, distributed, and mailed when necessary.

The Vision

There are 6 arenas of activity. Overarching as crucial components to be woven throughout are: 1-History, 2-Outreach and Mission, and 3-Welcome. The principal Mission Priorities are: 4-Utilizing the Parsonage, 5-Better Use of Church Space, and 6-Grow our Gathering.



Paramount to Zion is its history.

Zion has an important history and presents to the world a physical embodiment of the longevity of faithful communities. The following 3 Mission Priorities will endeavor to protect the historic fabric of Zion. We seek to grow the History Room and our compilation of the Church's history for ourselves and the community.



Paramount to Zion is outreach and mission.

With outreach and mission paramount to the life of Zion, the following 3 Mission Priorities will expand and enhance our outreach and mission. Every effort of strengthening Zion is simultaneously an effort to increase our compassionate and inclusive outreach.



Paramount to Zion is an extravagant welcome.

The following 3 Mission Priorities will seek to enhance our welcome. This includes becoming the best Open and Affirming (O&A) Congregation possible. It also includes ensuring our practices and spaces are considerate and accessible to all. Therefore, the following Mission Priorities will improve our accessibility. This includes physical changes that ensure access, and it includes alterations in our worship liturgy and singing to ensure we do not use ostracizing language but always use expansive welcoming language.

Mission Priority 1 – Utilizing the Parsonage



Historically churches provided parsonages to house their clergy. Early in the life of Zion, a smaller parsonage nestled close to the church building. Newspaper clippings proclaim its use for many weddings. In the 1920s, a larger parsonage was built, to provide a loving home to Zion's pastors. Prior to the COVID pandemic, the parsonage was rented to non-profits who shared in Zion's mission. All leases have ended, and the building is vacant today.

Our 5-year plan declares we determine a use for the parsonage. Early in our efforts, we need to assess the building and its systems to determine the investment necessary to make it usable and/or habitable.

Ideas have been suggested regarding the parsonage:

Use Should we use it for the programming and ministries of Zion? This is more than likely the least expensive as it may not require much updating or remodeling.

Lease Should we lease it? Leasing it commercially likely means we will need to add ceiling sprinklers.

Sell Should we sell it? We will need to determine whether to sell as-is or update the building.

Demolish Should we demolish it? Years ago, this was explored to provide parking. Because it was determined to be an important historic structure in the Potomac-Broadway Historic District, demolition was not an option. Parking was negotiated behind the parsonage.

A Pathway Forward

Create a Parsonage Team. Instruct them to determine its best use as a resource of this vision and Zion's growth future.

After studying, dreaming, and asking for God's Wisdom, the team will craft a plan detailing its recommendation within three months to focus on:

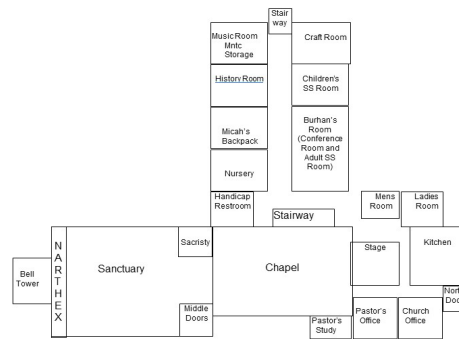
1. the three possible solutions for the parsonage, selling, leasing, or renovating it
2. the cost and timeframe to accomplish each option
3. the viability of each option
4. the funding source(s) for each option
5. the team's recommendation to the Consistory and the Congregation



Mission Priority 2 – Better Use of Church Space

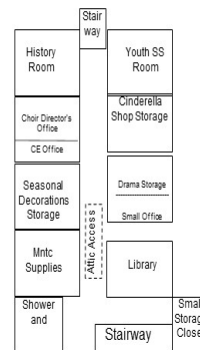
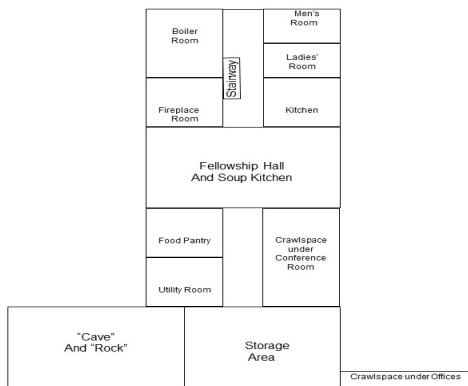
Zion has many rooms, and a vibrant, future congregation will need these rooms to be better utilized. We should robustly use our lovely, well-kept spaces to bring in income through rental agreements. Once upon a beautiful history, Zion celebrated a vast Sunday School attendance. The Church invested in a couple of building initiatives creating a large Christian Education (CE) Wing. The ground floor house the Burhans Room, a Nursery, a History Room, two rooms for CE and the Choir/Janitorial room. The lower floor has been updated and is being used for the Tuesday Ministries, birthday party rentals, and scrapbooking events. The upper floor hosts the old History Room, the Director of Music office, Christian Education office, the Cinderella Room, a storage room, a seasonal decorations room, a maintenance storage room with shower, and a couple of rooms once used as a library and a classroom.

Building Plan - Ground Floor



Building Plan - Second Floor

Building Plan - Basement



A Pathway Forward

- Create a Building Use Team
- Study all spaces and determine whether Zion could reorganize so spaces are rented to non-profits or other organizations that share Zion's vision.
- Determine whether we can utilize spaces without American Disabilities Act (ADA) expansions such as an elevator. If it is necessary to make structural changes, defer costs to a Capital Campaign.
- Answer whether we need to add sprinklers to rent our rooms or make any other investments for such use.
- Prepare a plan to consolidate storage at Zion if needed to provide rooms for rental.
- Determine if any walls, new doors, bathrooms need to be created or modified to enable rentable spaces.
- Determine whether becoming a National Landmark may help us rent spaces.
 - If so, write a process to become a National Landmark.
- If it is determined to keep the Parsonage for our use, ask the Building Use Team to collaborate with the Parsonage Use Team to see if any functional use in the church can to the parsonage providing more rental space in the church.
- Craft a new building use policy with appropriate rental pricing and a schedule that keeps us at market rates.
 - Sanctuary/Chapel rental for concerts, weddings, lectures, etc.
 - Fellowship Hall/Kitchen for seminars, parties, cheaper weddings, lectures, etc.
 - Christian Education rooms rented out. *One idea is to rent them out as remote offices for workers who don't go into an office and cannot work from home.*
- Grant funding has been receive to create an automatic door-opening handicapped entrance at the double doors going out to the Living Memorial Garden. Consider adding a new pedestrian door with an automatic opener. These costs can be deferred to a Capital Campaign which can include pursuits of grants.
- Bring a plan to the congregation.



Mission Priority 3 – Grow our Gathering

Zion loves Zion. Zion loves its community and would love to have more people in our family. The Visioning Event lifted many initiatives to better serve our members and to attract new members. Demographically, we seek to focus on youth, young adults, young families, and elder care. We also hope to better support members of all ages by providing different kinds of pastoral care and services to each other (e.g., transportation). Growing our gathering entails better communications.

A Pathway Forward

- Create a Grow Members Team
- Assign them the task of further vetting and perfecting the new committee/ministries structure begun at the August Consistory Training event. See Notes from 2024 Summer Consistory Retreat.

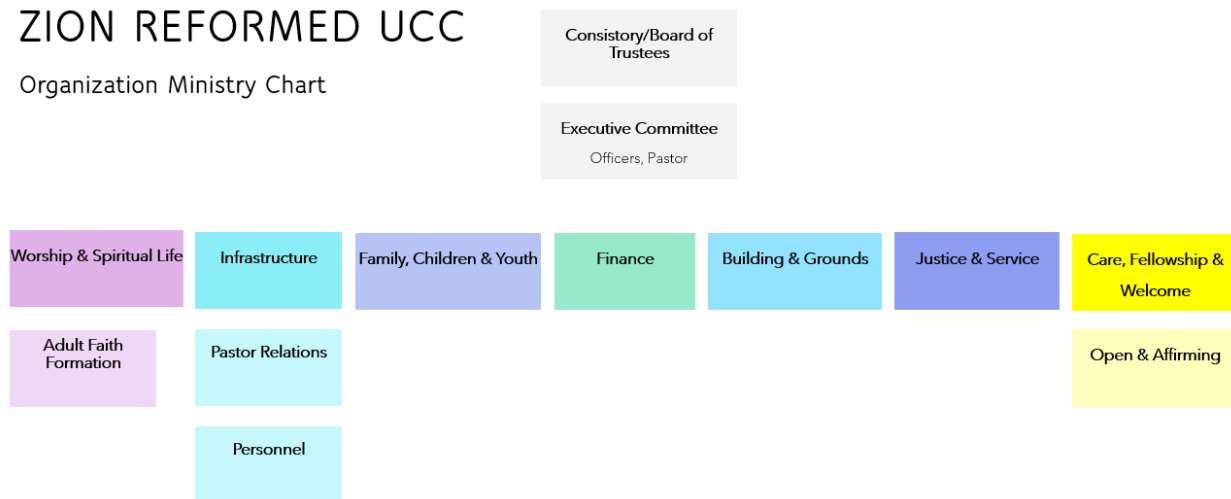
- Focus on a plan to implement and recruit leaders for the committee/ministries initially focusing on youth, young adults, young families and elder care.
- Determine whether our staff structure is adequate to provide for growth.
- Focus on the communication channels at Zion and prepare a plan for their improvement.
- Plan training occasions to ensure as many members and friends as possible know how to use our technology we utilize for communication (REALM, website, online giving, calendar).
- Bring a plan to the congregation.

Notes from 2024 Summer Consistory Retreat

Establish 7 Principal Ministries each with an Elder Chair, Elder Co-Chairs or Liaison(s). The Pastor and Consistory President are ex-officio on all ministries.

ZION REFORMED UCC

Organization Ministry Chart



Consistory/Board of Trustees: provides spiritual and administrative leadership for Zion.

Overall Zion Vision

Volunteer recruitment

Property Rental policies

Executive Committee: meets to plan the Consistory agenda for and discuss issues related to upcoming Consistory meetings, responsible for leadership development including annual training.

Nominating Committee for Consistory Elders

UCC Delegates

Leadership Development Chairs/Elder Liaisons of Ministries

Worship & Spiritual Life Ministry: directs worship experiences of Zion, in the Sanctuary, online services, Park Services, Seasonal Services, Oversight of Weddings and Funerals.

Music

Organ/Piano

Inclusive/expansive language initiatives

Pew Bibles and Hymnals

Adult faith formation
Acolytes
Flowers & Seasonal Decorating (sanctuary)
Altar Cloths

Ushers
Lectors
Communion
Greeters

Infrastructure Ministry: directs all technology and maintains budget for all tech and office equipment and supplies.

Zoom Stations
Sound System
Website
Internet
Copier Lease
Software
Computer Hardware

Personnel Sub-Committee
Hiring
Employee Benefits
Contracts with Contracted labor
Staff Reviews
Pastor Relations Sub-Committee

Families, Children & Youth Ministry: Directs Children and Youth Sunday School and any other educational programming.

Nursery
Vacation Bible School
Youth Programming

Mummers Parade
Children's Church

Finance Ministry: manages the financial systems of Zion Church.

Endowments
Oversight of Counters
Insurance
Investments

Annual Stewardship Drive
Budget Preparation
Special Offerings
Grants

Building and Grounds Ministry: oversees the maintenance and cleaning of the physical property of the church including inside and outside of the church and its grounds, and directs building use and rentals.

Facility Cleaning
Parsonage Maintenance
Parking Lot Maintenance

Lawn Maintenance and Landscaping
Cemetery Preservation
HVAC, Plumbing, Electrical systems

Justice and Service Ministry: directs all external service activities of Zion local and global.

Micah's Backpack
Community Resource Fair
Cinderella Shop
Tuesday Night Ministries
Fundraising Dinners
Local Mission

Global Mission
UCC Wider Mission

Press Releases
HARC Participation
Block Parties

Advertising

4-H

History Room

Historic House of Worship Tour

Care, Fellowship & Welcome Ministry: directs pastoral care visitation, fellowship events, church plays, coffee and fellowship foods, and provides for parishioner care: get well cards, meals, transportation, emergency funds.

Fellowship Events (pool parties, movie nights)

Deliver meals to members

Seasonal Decorating (Sanctuary/Chapel)

New member inquiry classes

Pew Cards (prayer and contact cards)

Membership Directories

Sunday Lunch Bunch

Visitation

Zion Theatre

ONA Sub-committee

Annual Review of Membership Roles

Collaboration with Christ's Reformed

In 1855, many members left Zion to create a new congregation to continue worshipping in the German language. This fellowship became the Christ's Reformed United Church of Christ on Franklin Street in Hagerstown. Zion and Christ's Reformed have vibrant histories.

Christ's Reformed is also undergoing a visioning process facilitated by Mrs. Jill White. Jill White has shared that many years ago, Zion, Christ's Reformed, and Holy Trinity UCC had a joint planning process to determine ways to collaborate or possibly merge. The congregations were not ready for any strong move. Therefore, nothing new occurred after that planning. Sadly, Holy Trinity UCC closed in April 2022.

Zion and Christ's Reformed suffered during the COVID pandemic and seek to recover. Without aggressive action, both congregations may be subject to continuing declines in membership and ministry activity. Both congregations are confounded with costly facilities that are underutilized. Both congregations have small member numbers and slow to little growth recently. Both congregations have dwindling endowments and reduced income streams. Both congregations seek to expand their leadership bases. And both congregations want to expand outreach to the community.

We should discuss whether **deepening our collaboration** is prudent at this time which might enable our congregations to better realize a shared vision that is larger than our independent visions.

Next Steps

Timeline:

October 13 - Present the strategic plan draft to the congregation,
October (3 weeks) - Congregation has time to review the plan draft,
November 3 - Congregation votes on the plan to accept the plan,
November - February - Teams will work on the project definition and Smart Goals
For projects needing capital, establish a Capital Campaign goal.
Contract with the UCC's Jill White to perform a feasibility study.
Build a Capital Campaign Team.
Start the Campaign.
Implement the Vision!!!

How to get involved:

[Dream ... Pray ... Give ... Breathe ... Volunteer ... Smile ... Dance](#)

Meet with a mission priority leader to learn more.

Becky Hohman – [Parsonage](#)

Kim Ridenour - [Church Space](#)

Megan and Mark Shroyer – [Grow](#)

Consider joining a Mission Priority Team.

