

# Driving Questions

Why Continue Strategic Planning *Now*?

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In my first year of ministry at United Church of Chapel Hill, I've been carrying with me a number of questions raised by developments in our life together. In many institutions, strategic planning efforts arise in response to a number of "Driving Questions." I've been trying to articulate some of our driving questions, and I'd love to share with you how those sound to me now.

- 1. What does it mean for us that the *La Mesa* service has more than doubled in size in only one year? How will our structures of governance and ministry need to change to provide leadership opportunities and voice to everyone who worships at United Church of Chapel Hill?**

It could be argued that United Church is a different congregation today than it was one year ago, when approximately 40 people worshipped in the Assembly Hall and the music director was YouTube. Today *La Mesa* is a strong worship service frequently attracting more than 100 people. It has a vibrant praise band, a dedicated team of leaders and volunteers, and a beloved lead pastor. Wow! Thanks be to God!

- 2. How will United Church of Chapel Hill continue to grow as an antiracist and multicultural congregation and institutionalize/operationalize our commitments to racial equity?**

Our congregation has studied this question for years and it was a locus of energy in our recent retreat of the Church Council and Personnel Committee. Many people have reached out to our Coordinating Team to offer their assistance and expertise. It's clear that the Environmental Scan we conduct soon will include a review of our vendors, budget, and personnel. We'll be talking about how to build a more durable racial lens into our ministry.

- 3. What is needed for the continued vitality and growth of our rich program of discipleship ministries, especially our programs for children and youth?**

*La Mesa* is not the only area of the church that has experienced growth recently. Our richly diverse Confirmation and Youth Choir programs have significantly exceeded expectations in the past year. We also saw growth this year in the Chancel Choir. Our Sunday School program is very strong and attendance at quarterly Children's Church always surprises me. It's clear that these programs show tremendous promise for the future, but their growth is limited by an overstuffed Sunday morning schedule and insufficient staff time for program development.

**4. How can we build a stronger web of relationships throughout the life of the church so that every member and household feels a strong spiritual connection with the heart of our ministry?**

A key priority for the church is knitting the fabric of our community more tightly. We discussed in our January retreat methods for promoting interaction across our worship services. This spring we're piloting a new small group neighborhood ministry. We want everyone to feel the love, support, and care of our church family.

**5. How will United Church attract the financial resources it needs for sustainable ministry in the coming years and what goals should we set for capital and operational funding?**

We are in a very strong and healthy financial position. Our congregation is very generous in funding our ministry and the church is carrying no debt. We recognize, however, that many religious institutions do struggle financially and we know that the future will bring significant costs to maintain our building and update our systems. We also feel the pinch in several ministry areas that need more financial support.

**6. What is a desirable size for the congregation in terms of membership and how aggressively should we set those goals?**

Our congregation grew very rapidly between 1999 and 2012. We hit our peak at nearly 1,000 members but in recent years we have lost more members than we have taken in. Maintaining a vigorous program of ministries—two or three worship services, staff for children and youth, a busy schedule of music and outreach—demands the resources of a certain scale. We'll need a plan for getting where we need to be to do the work God is calling us to do.

I'm still chewing on these questions. I carry them with me every day that I have the privilege of walking in ministry with you. They are driving the planning process we're embarking on this year. I'd love to know how they're sounding to you.