

**United Church of Gainesville
2016-2019 Three-Year Plan**

“What declaration of possibility can you make that has the power to transform the community and inspire you?”

- Peter Block, *Community: The Shape of Belonging*

This question by Peter Block has been a touchstone in this year’s three-year planning process at UCG. In the many conversations that we, as ministers and the Congregation-Ministry Review Board, have had about the plan which will guide this congregation from 2016 to 2019, three declarations of possibility have emerged which inspire us and which we believe can transform our community in beautiful ways. These are declarations about how we as a church might use the plan we have created, and as you read the rest of this plan, we hope you will keep these possibilities in mind.

1. This three-year plan can become a true mission for UCG.

What if we allowed these three priorities to really shape the decisions we make, the ministry we engage in, and the way we are with one another over the next three years? What if we focused all of the amazing energy of our community on these three big goals? What could we achieve together? (What *couldn't* we achieve?!)

2. This three-year plan can belong to the whole congregation.

What if we all took ownership of this mission together? What if each of us put our gifts, and skills, and resources behind it? What if it became a vision we were willing to risk something for? What if our children, our youth, and even our visitors came to own this plan with us?

3. This three-year plan can transform the quality of our life together, not just the quantity of our programming.

What if we allowed these three priorities to shape every meeting, group, or interaction we have with one another as a church? What if they became our congregational culture over the next three years, so that justice, nurture, and spiritual growth were the DNA of everything we do? What if we could achieve this mission without adding more events or programs in our already busy calendars?

We are inspired by the priorities that UCG has identified for the next three years. We hope you will be inspired to claim them as our common mission; to own them personally and use your gifts to help achieve them; and to look for ways to weave these priorities into all that we do, to make justice, and nurture, and spiritual growth our congregational culture over the next three years (and longer!).

Priority One Create diverse opportunities for spiritual growth for all ages.

The responses we received on Priority Sunday suggest that as a congregation we believe that spiritual growth does not come primarily from particular programs or activities, but from a quality of life characterized by certain practices. The practices raised most often by our congregation included **PRESENCE, OPENNESS, and CURIOSITY.**

While these practices will be enhanced through opportunities for education and experiential learning, we also believe that our spiritual growth as individuals and as a congregation will be best served by incorporating these practices into every area of our life together, and in addition to the specific ideas below, we encourage each group and individual within UCG to consider how they might incorporate these practices into their participation across the life of our church.

“Spiritual growth is when the ordinary becomes extraordinary.” – one of our Chalk Talk participants

Goal 1: We seek to promote spiritual growth by practicing PRESENCE both in the quality of our engagement with ourselves, one another and the sacred and in our availability to each other in seasons of joy and pain.

To this end, we will:

- a. Incorporate habits designed to promote focused attention in the here and now into all our interactions. These habits may include, among others, turning off electronics, using a spiritual focus, ringing a bell, silence, or the use of centering questions like “How do you bring yourself to this place?”
- b. Promote and expand opportunities for education and experience of prayer, meditation, yoga, and other activities that promote focused presence.
- c. Promote and expand opportunities for sharing one another’s difficulties and challenges. This may include additional support groups (especially around divorce, grief, mental illness, and parenting challenges), seminars about how to talk about difficult subjects, and the continuation of our tradition of attending memorial services even for those members we did not know, etc.

Goal 2: We seek to promote spiritual growth by practicing OPENNESS and ACCEPTANCE toward ourselves, one another, and God, however known.

To this end, we will:

- a. Incorporate habits of silence, stillness, slowness, and rest into all of our interactions and into our total life as a congregation, believing that “unregimented time allows for human possibility to emerge.”
- b. Continue our work of inclusion of all people, offering space for each member of our church to find community and fulfillment and asking ourselves, “who is not present?” as we seek to expand our welcome.

- c. Promote an environment of listening and non-judgment in our actions with one another, offering opportunities for UCG members to share their beliefs and experiences with one another through worship, education and service opportunities, and personal interactions with one another.

Goal 3: We seek to promote spiritual growth by practicing CURIOSITY in serious spiritual and intellectual inquiry that values questions and in support of all members on their spiritual journeys.

To this end, we will:

- a. Continue our strong tradition of inquiry through seminars, small groups, worship, and other programs which engage “the hard questions” and value seeking over certainty.
- b. Expand and tailor opportunities for spiritual exploration as guided by the needs of the congregation, offering space for in-depth engagement with various traditions.
- c. Expand opportunities to explore connections between God and nature based on the prevalence of these responses on Priority Sunday.

Priority Two Strengthen care for the congregation by the congregation across the life course.

The United Church of Gainesville nurtures its members through the gifts and strengths of the ministers and members of the congregation. We seek to build health and wholeness through integrated and intentional care of body, mind, and spirit in meaningful ways throughout the life course. Toward this end, we will ascertain ways to support community involvement, social connection, service opportunities, and accompaniment in times of significant life events, change and/or crisis. Overall, we will foster a climate of inclusion and belonging that engenders resilience and maximizes participation by all members of the congregation.

Three areas emerged from the congregation as essential to our self-identification as a congregation of care:

1. **CONNECTION:** “being there” for one another through visitation, accompaniment, spiritual practice, active listening, social belonging, advocacy, and hospitality.
2. **NURTURE:** using congregational giftedness to assist when others in the church are in need and/or face crises.
3. **HEALTH PROMOTION:** enhancing health for all members through opportunities for attention to the whole person throughout the life course, recognizing that spiritual, physical, social, and psychological well-being is not simply the absence of disease, but also includes harmony with self, others, the environment, and God, however known.

"Caring for each other is who we are! Everything we do as UCG is related to health!" – one of our Chalk Talk participants

Goal 1: In every area of UCG life, we will provide opportunities for CONNECTION for members and friends.

To this end, we will:

- a. Provide Fellowship opportunities that nurture body and spirit through activities, snacks, and opportunities that foster connection to each other and to the environment.
- b. Encourage the Board of Membership to educate the congregation on ways we may enhance connections for visitors/new members at UCG.
- c. Regularly assess members and friends for the gifts and strengths they can offer as volunteers.
- d. Expand small groups and other ways to enhance opportunities for deepening social relationships.

Goal 2: In every area of UCG life, we will provide opportunities for NURTURE.

To this end, we will:

- a. Invite the Health Ministry Team to assess and creatively address ways in which members can respond and help to foster resilience as emergent needs and crises occur (such as new diagnoses, post-hospitalization care, medical management, aging in place, grief and loss).
- b. Assess various age/identity constituencies for needs and opportunities for nurture offered, such as parenting classes, caregivers respite information, end-of-life care, healthcare powers of attorney, LGBTQ (and others) adoption information, multi-race families, singles, divorced, widowed, individuals and/or their family members living with mental illness, addictions, etc.

Goal 3: In every area of UCG life, we will provide opportunities for HEALTH PROMOTION.

To this end, we will:

- a. Invite participants from the Adult Small Groups, Sunday Seminars, United Tribes, Youth Groups, Young Adult Ministry, and Retreat Committee to include subject matters related to health (physical, spiritual, mental, social), nurture, connection, and resilience.
- b. Encourage the Social Justice and Compassion in Action Committees to address health issues, such as food security and health care equity, especially within particular populations (for example, health care disparities among LGBTQ, persons of color, etc.).
- c. Invite the Board of Business and Enlistment and Endowment committees to encourage members to dedicate appropriate funds from the UCG budget and from their personal donations to enable resources devoted to education, nurture, connection, and promotion of congregational and community health across the life course.

Priority Three Work for justice and transformation around issues of poverty, race, and environment.

The United Church of Gainesville has always been a place where issues of justice and concern have been at the forefront of our work. With our outreach, we seek to provoke change in ourselves and in our community through **EDUCATION, EMPATHY AND ACTION**.

By educating ourselves, listening to those affected by systemic injustices, learning about the societal and cultural barriers that create and sustain systems of oppression, environmental degradation and poverty, and participating in transformative relationships that provoke care and concern for all of creation, we believe we can achieve a transformational ministry that will bring about real and significant change - not just for the outside world but for ourselves as well.

"I will not just "THINK" about how wonderful it would be to address these issues, I will be part of a movement to "DO" something." – one of our Chalk Talk participants

Goal 1: The United Church of Gainesville will be a transformative agent for positive change through our focused approach to the EDUCATION of our community around issues of poverty, race and the environment.

To this end, we will:

- a. Inspire the congregation to have a holistic understanding of the justice and compassion ministries we are already engaged in through enhanced communication via our website, written materials, Sunday Seminar speakers and Worship offerings.
- b. Invite participants from our Social Justice, Compassion in Action, Family Promise, Open and Affirming Boards and Committees to meet with our Sunday Seminar and our Adult Small Group Committees biannually to explore ways we can improve communication, coordinate calendars, unify our messaging and deepen our understandings around the issues of race, poverty and the environment to the entire church community.
- c. Incorporate the recommendations from these meetings into our outreach and justice education ministries and communicate and promote them to the wider community.

Goal 2: We will inspire the members of the United Church of Gainesville to be transformative agents for social change through EMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING.

To this end we will:

- a. Encourage our Compassion in Action, Open and Affirming, Social Justice, and Family Promise Committees as well as the Racial Justice Task Force to research ways that our membership can be engaged in helpful and transformative personal relationships with the agencies and individuals we assist and advocate for through our outreach and justice programs.

- b. Intentionally make space in our process of providing advocacy opportunities for the wider congregation through our Outreach and Justice committees to incorporate the use of personal story and interpersonal dialogue.
- c. Provide regular opportunities through our Adult Small Groups and worship experiences to engage in interpersonal outreach experiences that give us a greater understanding of the personal impacts of racial injustice, poverty and environmental degradation.

“I find myself transformed into the person I want to be by joining others in the process of preparing a meal at Grace Marketplace.” – one of our Chalk Talk participants.

Goal 3: Through our combined ministries we will invite church members to intentionally engage with our wider community to participate in socially transformative ACTIONS that will bring about significant change in the areas of racial oppression, income disparity and environmental degradation.

To this end we will:

- a. Communicate our work and education opportunities to our partner agencies, and intentionally invite others into our church home to share in our combined actions toward our desired goals of significant change.
- b. Deepen our interpersonal connections with our partner agencies doing the work of love and justice through active participation in social engagement and advocacy opportunities outside of our church campus.
- c. Intentionally encourage UCG members to join outside boards and committees doing the work of love and justice in the areas of racial oppression, poverty and the environment, and provide opportunities to share their experiences and learnings with our church community.

Postscript

With the congregation’s approval at our May congregational meeting, this will become our 2016-2019 three-year plan. But only with your commitment will it become our mission. And only with all of our hard work will we achieve our goals. So we leave you with a few final questions from Peter Block to ponder as we move forward:

How participative do you plan to be?

What is the promise you’re willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for you?

What is the gift you still hold in exile?

THE PROCESS OF CREATING THE THREE-YEAR PLAN 2016-2019

Every four years, the congregation is asked to complete a survey to obtain important data to be used in creating a Three-Year Plan. The Three-Year Plan helps to guide the directions for the ministry of the congregation as well as adding clarity to our self-understanding.

The Congregation-Ministry Review Board (CMRB) is the administrative and visioning center for the Three-Year Plan. CMRB prepares and promotes the survey, collates the data, distills the pertinent information, crafts the apparent priorities that arise from the congregation's input, and then creates and presents the finalized version of the Three-Year Plan.

The steps for creating the Three-Year Plan for 2016-2019 included the following:

- A. The current Three-Year Plan (2011-2014) was evaluated during January-April 2015 (with assistance from Boards, CMRB/ Ministers)
- B. The Congregational Survey was crafted during May-October 2015 (Boards, CMRB/ Ministers, office staff, with assistance from Taylor Stein)
- C. Congregation took the All-Church Survey October 11-October 31.
- D. Results of the Congregational Survey were examined and Three Priorities were identified during November-December 2015. (Priority Writing Team – Barbara Rienzo, Erick Smith, Shelly Wilson)
- E. Priority Sunday was set for January 31, 2016. During two worship services and during United Tribes and Youth Group gatherings, the entire congregation, via Chalk Talks, provided written feedback and reflection upon the meaning of the Three Priorities. (Planned and led by Ministerial Team, Moderator, CMRB members, Board and Committee Chairs, others)
- F. All Chalk Talks were read and materials grouped into recurring themes during February 2016 (CMRB/ Ministers)
- G. 2016-2019 Three-Year Plan created, edited, and refined during March 2016 (Three Year Plan Writing team: Vince Amlin and Deborah Hill; Andy Bachmann and John Eyley; Shelly Wilson and Barb Rienzo)
- H. The 2016-2019 Three-Year Plan was examined and approved by the members of the Congregational Ministry Review Board on April 13, 2016. It will be brought for consideration by the Church Council on April 20, 2016 and by the UCG Congregation on May 15, 2016. After it has been approved by the congregation, it will be adopted as a guide for programming and for prioritizing our life together for the next three years.

CMRB Members 2015-16

John Eyler, Chair
Andrew Ragsdale
Deborah Hill
Jeanne Moberly
William Dougherty
Nancy Dana

Angela Hoppe
Erick Smith
Barbara Rienzo
John Denny
Vince Amlin
Andy Bachmann

Vince Amlin
Andy Bachmann
Shelly Wilson