

Park Avenue Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



2020 Vision Commission

Congregational Report: Findings and
Recommendations

12 December 2011

2020 Commission Report

“God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (--Micah 6:8)

1. Introduction

Park Avenue Christian Church, a historic Disciples of Christ congregation now also affiliated with United Church of Christ, has grown from the faithful nine who gathered around a kitchen table in Lower Manhattan to the hundreds who today gather on the Upper East Side to worship and serve. For 201 years, we have endeavoured to bloom where we are planted in one of the greatest cities in the world and to respond to the prophet Micah's call to “act justly, love mercy and walk with humbly with our God.”

2. Vision, Values and Mission

(This vision, values and mission statement comes primarily from the work of the 2010 Commission, with the exception of the number of members we now foresee for 2020.)

Vision

We dare to **SEE** a faithful, growing healthy congregation of **5000 persons** over the next ten years that seeks to demonstrate true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice.

Values

We dare to **BE** a church that embraces the divinity and dignity of difference by actively seeking and welcoming all people regardless of race, age, culture, economic circumstance, sexual/gender orientation, physical or mental condition. We dare to be a church that lives to serve others.

Mission

We dare to **DO** ministry in such a way that reaches and impacts the upper east side, the city of New York and beyond with the radical claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ through our worship and our witness as we strive to build and model the beloved community of God.

3. Purpose and Scope

The 2020 Commission appointed by the Ministry Council commenced its work this summer and was charged with taking three months to consider the following:

2020 Commission Report

- What is the vision, values and mission of the PARK in the year 2020? Is it the same as 2011? If not, in what ways might it be different? What do we sense God calling us to be and do over the next ten years?
- What about the congregation? What size congregation by 2020? What might be the make-up of the congregation – geographically, ethnically culturally, family configurations? What are the implications for mission and ministry? Space requirements?
- What about the city and the community surrounding our location? What are the most pressing needs? In what ways are we uniquely gifted and equipped to meet those needs? Are there one or two needs that might intersect with our passion and values and become a part of the signature mission for the PARK?
- What about the Day School? 2013 will be the 50th anniversary of the Day School. Are we committed to continuing for another 50 years with the Park Avenue Christian Church Day School? Does it fit our mission? Is it a model that is economically feasible and sustainable for the church? If not, can the model be changed? If not the Day School, what is the possibility and feasibility of another school in our space or off site?
- What about the Saturday Lunch Program? Are we committed to continuing and expanding this program? What are ways the program might be expanded?
- What about music and the arts? What are our dreams for 2020?
- What about staff? What kind and size staff will we need to support our vision and dreams for 2020?
- What about stewardship? What is the size and scope of a capital – mission/ministry campaign as we approach 2020?

-June 20, 2011

This report is a result of the rich conversations about the hopes and challenges for our beloved community. The following four areas of ministry emerged from above questions as areas where there is incredible potential for growth in this community of faith:

- (1) **Hospitality and Justice**—as radically welcoming the divinity and dignity of difference, ministering to and advocating for the marginalized in society;
- (2) **Worship, Music, and the Arts**—as incarnational, prophetic, and joyful expressions of the Good News of God's inclusive love for this world;
- (3) **Children, Youth, and Education**—reaching and serving families with children and youth in our neighborhood and beyond; and
- (4) **Development and Stewardship**—giving of ourselves, our talents, and our financial resources, for our ministry of justice, love, and faithfulness

4. Recommendations and Strategic Directions

After much conversation, reflection, discernment and consideration, the following recommendation has been submitted by the members of the 2020 Commission.

Charge the Ministry Council to take the following actions:

2020 Commission Report

1. **Appoint a team to develop a plan for renovating the sanctuary** and making it more functional and accessible.
2. **Charge the Mission Team to develop strategy** to engage the congregation to be involved in local and global mission work.
3. **Create a Music and Arts Team to develop the plan and strategy for Music and Arts at the Park.** Working with the Building Team, determine the upgrades needed to improve the lighting and sound systems to accommodate the technical needs of both worship services and Arts events. Additionally, these teams, in coordination with the Ministry Council will determine the upgrades repairs and/or restorations needed by the Holtkamp pipe organ and the Steinway piano within the sanctuary to facilitate their ongoing use in worship, concerts and other musical events.
4. **Establish a Children/Youth Team to review all current programs for children and youth** and work with the Ministry Council and the Director of Children's Programs to develop a strategy to engage children and youth at all levels in the life of the church.
5. **Create a new Stewardship/Development Team** that develops and executes a plan to help the congregation realize its fundraising goals. Additionally, this team will be charged with developing a communication strategy to inform and inspire the congregation concerning the goals and importance of giving.
6. **Create a Communications Team to strengthen community** by developing the technology for a "Church Without Walls."

5. 2020 Commission Vision Documents

The 2020 Commission worked in subgroups to discern the vision for the four areas of ministry identified in this faith community where the potential exists for significant growth. Each subgroup submitted a report to the whole commission who then revised it so that it would reflect the thinking of the entire commission. The reports that follow reflect the vision of the entire 2020 Commission.

5.1. Hospitality and Justice

We affirm the Vision, Values, and Mission of the 2010 Report, with a current vision of a worshipping congregation of 5000, as an expression of our charge for 2020 at The Park. A 5,000 member congregation will of course mean multiple worship services and multiple means of people connecting with our community. It will also mean our growing larger and smaller at the same time – large group celebration on Sunday mornings and small group study, service and fellowship opportunities throughout the week and through the world-wide web.

Radical Welcome. We envision The Park as a place where people can live out the gospel imperative to build the kingdom of God in this time and place, creating the beloved community. We envision that this is a place where people become equipped for the work of ministry. But providing a radical welcome means

that we are open to the diversity of gifts and expressions others bring and open to the changes that will be required of us as we provide that welcome.

Our ministries of compassion and justice. We see the expansion of our **Saturday Lunch Program** and **Lifeline**. We see the revitalization of **Quest**, providing educational opportunities for deepening understanding on issues of faith, culture, and society—particularly regarding inter-faith relationships and GLBT concerns. Additionally, we cannot claim to welcome all and yet not advocate for the rights of all who come to live and work in this country. To live into this commitment we will **advocate** for immigrants and refugees, those in need of healthcare and housing, those in need of employment and fair compensation, and other needs yet unidentified.

Our ministry of space. Our sanctuary provides a beautiful place away from the noise of our city, and is used by persons who come through our doors during the work week. We envision that this **sanctuary will become more accessible**, providing more space without pews for liturgical drama, dance, and music, for example, as well as ramps and space for adults and children who use wheelchairs. Space beneath the sanctuary will be used not only for storage, as it is now, but also for meetings and fellowship. The **Adams Building will become a comprehensive center for ministry** (in its current or a radically different form) with facilities that are more accessible for those with physical challenges, beyond the current lift and single elevator. It will provide affordable space for use by community groups as well as provide space for all the growing ministries of the Park. We envision that it will restore our congregation's longstanding commitment to hospitality, providing space and amenities for visiting youth groups and affordable rooms for guests.

We see our **community as both neighborly, in the Upper East Side, and metropolitan**, embracing the larger NYC area and beyond. Through the expanded use of web technology we will **create a “Church without Walls”** that has an impact far beyond our current in-person worshipping congregation. Additionally, we continue to see our community as being in *covenant* with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, in their local, regional, and national manifestations.

5.2. Music and the Arts

We want to give our church songs not yet sung, images not yet imagined, words not yet forged into poems, dances not yet rehearsed in our muscles and bones, and all the other dazzling testimonies to the creative power of God at work here within the creation. - Nancy Chinn

We affirm that the role of the arts and music in the church is not simply a decorative or functional one, but we see their role in several ways:

Incarnational - they give our faith flesh and blood; they give color, shape and sound to our understanding and interpretations of faith; they affirm our belief in a creative, loving God who made the universe and called it good; they affirm our humanity and the capacity of the human body to reveal God's nature and being; they often allow us to experience the diversity of creation and humanity beyond our own limited context.

Prophetic - they awaken us from the dullness of the ordinary and expected—and present bold new possibilities and perspectives; they challenge us and can also

2020 Commission Report

call into question, or call us to question, the idolatries of society that we too often take as givens.

Theological - the arts and music give rise to thought, inviting us to think about faith in ways that discursive essays simply cannot; and they resist dogmatic interpretation, enabling us to explore ideas that might seem off limits ("heretical") if stated in other forms.

Evangelistic - our Music and Arts ministry need not convince others of the rightness of our faith but we see them as a broader invitation to "taste and see the goodness of God" as expressed in sound, color and movement. We see music and the Arts as something that awaken us to our shared humanity and imagine a Music and Arts ministry that celebrates faith, spirituality and human diversity in its broadest forms.

To this end, we envision that:

1. *The Park* will continue its **strong affirmation of the full spectrum of Arts in worship, mission and service**. We wish to see the regular participation of artists in our community life. These may include but are not limited to painting, sculpture, poetry, film, photography, floral design, music and dance. These works might be connected to a specific festival or holiday; a season of the liturgical year or a theme drawn from readings in the Revised Common Lectionary; a particular outreach/mission/ service event.
2. We believe that *The Park's* deepest values of justice and imagination need to be seen, heard, sung, danced and celebrated through the Arts and Music. To that end, we aim to **encourage and support artists whose work advocates for justice, equality, inclusion** or initiates dialogue and conversation around contemporary social issues and challenges.
3. We imagine a distinctive **Artist-in-Residence program** that will enrich and broaden the life of the congregation and community. We have welcomed a small theater company, *Compagnia de' Colombari*, to partner with us this year and we see this model extending to artists and ensembles from all artistic disciplines in the years to come.
4. We imagine an **additional space** alongside our Sanctuary that will provide **a functional, flexible and public context for art, theater and musical events**. This space may even be off-site (e.g., a storefront gallery/black box theater/studio space). We see a need for a less formal space that can welcome individuals from outside the community to engage with *The Park*.
5. Rather than see ourselves as owners or curators of artistic work, **we imagine *The Park's* walls as a permeable membrane**, welcoming an inward and outward flow of energy, ideas, resources and people. We believe that the more we understand ourselves within a larger network or honeycomb of artistic relationships (within and outside the church), the wider our reach and witness will be. We see potential partnerships with colleges, universities, seminaries, other communities of faith, dance and theater companies, chamber ensembles and orchestras, artists' studios and galleries.

5.3. Children, Youth and Education

An undeniable essential to living out our vision, values and mission is an **intentional focus on children and youth** at the Park. Though in our recent history there have only

2020 Commission Report

been small numbers of children and youth actively involved in the life and work of the congregation, we know that if we are to be a strong and vital community, a major commitment of time and resources must be made reaching and serving families with children and youth in our neighborhood and beyond.

First and foremost, we recommend that **a complete review needs to be undertaken to determine the long-term viability of our current programs.** The first program that requires discernment is that of the **Park Avenue Christian Church Day School.** Though there remains a very high need for early childhood education in New York City and the Day School has become one of the premier Day Schools in the city, we must **discern whether it is the best fit for our mission and values.** We must also determine the real cost of running the Day School and review the space limitations imposed by having a school on our premises.

While our other current children and youth initiatives have merit and are gaining momentum, **we must vision without limits** what we could do and become in the future. We should not limit ourselves to space constraints or lack of adequate funding. We want to continue to build our Sunday morning programming, i.e., Sunday School classes, Children's Moment during worship, and Super Sunday with afternoon classes and activities for children, youth and families. We want to also explore **afterschool programming, summer camps, and adult learning** (GED classes, life-skills and employment training).

There are also possibilities and opportunities for **partnering with others in the city to provide housing, counselling, and other services for youth** (particularly gay youth), adopting a public school, working with a charter/parochial school that is making a difference, and/or sponsoring or supporting a school in Haiti or elsewhere.

5.4. Stewardship and Development

We are learning to **embrace and celebrate a theology of abundance:** a belief that God is the Creator of the world and that God has provided all that is necessary for the world to thrive, not merely survive.

We are also coming to understand, as stated by the Center for Faith and Giving, that **"Stewardship is not fundraising - it is a spiritual discipline!** Stewardship has a rich and varied meaning throughout the witness of scripture. It is not only about money, it is about the care and management of our lives and the abundance of the world in which we live them."

Our goal is **100% contribution from members** to the giving campaigns in the next 10 years.

We envisage a **10 year goal of \$3 million**, which is 10 times the current annual goal of \$300,000. We see \$1.8 million of the three million included in a special capital/mission campaign apart from our annual giving. The reorganization of stewardship/development at the Park and **establishing a dynamic giving structure** would take place in years 1 and 2. By year 5, we envisage raising \$600,000 in the annual campaign and by year 10, we envisage raising \$1.2 million. We would see starting the **capital/mission campaign** in the next two to three years, but this would be done in careful consultation with the Ministry Council, Stewardship/Development

2020 Commission Report

Team, and outside consultant; and the goals and timetables would be adjusted accordingly.

6. 2020 Commission Members:

Members of the 2020 Commission: Richard Sturm, chair; Melissa Little, Randall Tucker, Carl Buckland, Connie Packard, Ima Jean Kidd, Alvin Jackson, Jennifer Kottler and Paul Vasile. Consultant: Rev. Dr. William Edwards

Appendix: Supporting Information

Available on www.parkavenuechristian.com

2010 Commission Report and Recommendations

1994 Study Commission of the Arts in the Worship and Mission of Park Avenue Christian Church