

**LONG RANGE  
PLANNING TEAM  
REPORT**



***Fall 2014***

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## **Message From The Long Range Planning Team**

Most organizations and churches set priorities and goals and update their long-term plans from time to time. Sometimes there's a regular rhythm to this process, (every 5 years for instance). It became clear during the summer of 2013, as the Executive Council was becoming more familiar with our emerging new ministry under our then recently hired Senior Pastor, Pete Allen, that our church, HCC, had not done any such planning for many years.

Recently, however, in 2010 and 2011, we, as a church, had done some work discerning who we are, and who God is calling us to be, (the Discernment Process). Then in 2011 and 2012, we worked hard discerning who we want as our spiritual leader, (the Senior Pastor Search Process). After this groundwork was done, and we installed our new Senior Pastor, the timing was right for the Executive Council, seeing the wisdom in planning for the future, to approve the creation of a Long Range Planning Team. The mission of the team was to explore ways to engage the congregation in creating a vision for our church and then make recommendations and create an implementation plan for setting some priorities and goals for reaching the aspirations we collectively have for our church.

Executive Council appointed and approved an 8-member team to begin the process and work on a plan. The congregation commissioned this team during a worship service last winter. The team was assembled for the purpose of studying and discerning what HCC's visions are for the future and what actions, if any, might be taken to take our church on a journey from Good to Great.

The team worked very hard over the winter and throughout the spring of 2014, meeting regularly and making sure that every person who wanted to share his/her ideas had an opportunity to do so. The Long Range Planning Team met with 22 boards, committees, groups and ministries of the church. We met at the church, in people's homes and at Linden Ponds. We held 3 after-church open forums, conducted an on-line anonymous survey, and invited church members to engage in

personal conversations with team members. The team also reached out to organizations, businesses, our own UCC resources, and other churches to gather community input. We also posted our progress all around the vestry, cluttering the walls with the masses of ideas we were collecting and invited written reaction from the congregation during coffee hour.

We have spent the summer reviewing the feedback and looking for patterns. We prepared recommendations for the Executive Council and for the church. We now present you with this report. In summary, we heard from the congregation that we are very excited about the future possibilities of HCC, and that we collectively DO want to bring about positive changes and take our church from good to great. As you will see, some of the recommendations the Long Range Planning Team will require an investment of time, some an investment of money, but what we heard loud and clear from all of us in the church is that we want our church to be extraordinary.

We want to thank everyone who participated in this process for your energy, enthusiasm and most of all, for your ideas, both big and small. And while we may not be able to integrate every idea that came up into our future plans, it was your willingness to open up, share your dreams and visions, and consider exciting new possibilities for our church that is making this journey truly exciting.

We have tried our best to keep the entire process as transparent as possible and so we hope that you feel comfortable in reaching out to any one of us if you have any questions at all about this report.

*Thank you,*

*The Long Range Planning Team:*

*Kathi Blair, (Chair), Jonathan Harlow, (Moderator), Rev. Dr. Peter Allen, Allie Christopher, Phil Edmundson, Meredith Hollander, Gerald Jones, Jean Muller.*

## Message From the Senior Pastor

### Why Does a Church Need Long Range Planning?

The Long Range Planning Team believes that it is the right time in the life of our church to create a plan of action for the next 3-5 years and to begin executing that plan. We are asking: *Where do we want to go now? What steps do we need to take to get there?*

From a faith standpoint, why is this the time?

We believe that one of the ways God works in Hingham is through our wonderful church, *the church with a heart in the heart of Hingham*. Keeping this in mind, we believe it is important to make sure HCC is not just good, but *great*. What is greatness? It means doing our very best, with humility and grace, and with no sense of superiority or arrogance.

Being a *great* church requires faithfulness to the basics of the gospel, creative thinking, free flowing communication, receptive listening, engaged membership and leadership, and comprehensive follow through. Healthy, vibrant churches move ahead proactively rather than reactively.

Being a great church, *a church with a heart* – one that serves God, our members, our community, our world, and our guests – means creating an atmosphere of welcome and consistent hospitality, of trust and respect, of true belonging and empowerment.

How might we make this happen? The congregation has spoken and we are listening. You want to make sure we are helping members and friends to connect with God and each other, with expanded opportunities to make music, worship, learn, grow in faith, and serve our neighbors together. You want attractive, clean, safe, and appropriate meeting spaces for all types of folks, from children and youth to brides and grooms to seniors. You want additional staff to provide better support and more regular pastoral care.

We are thrilled at the opportunity to present this vision today. Thank you so much for your input and prayers.

Rev. Dr. Peter Allen,  
Senior Pastor

# **Who Are We? Who is God Calling Us To Be?**

In the spirit of properly embracing all that we learned during our Discernment process, (which occurred from January of 2009 to February of 2011), and the Senior Pastor Search Process, (which took place from 2010 to 2012), in the summer of 2013, both Rev. Pete and the Executive Council felt the time had come to celebrate our Discernment findings and bring the rich information that we discerned closer to our core and use it to make our future plans. Thus began the Long Range Planning process.

As many of you recall, HCC entered into a Discernment Process in January of 2009. It began after a dynamic presentation by Rev. Mary Luti at an All Boards meeting in June of 2008. She explained that when her UCC church in Cambridge delved into conversations about who they think God wants them to be, they discovered a clarity about their mission as a congregation. Doug Fortin, (our moderator at the time), and the Executive Council, were so moved that they decided this process could benefit our church. So, over a period of 2 years, from January 2009 to February of 2011, many conversations were held under the guidance of a small group of facilitators, (Mat MacIver, Phil Edmundson, Kathi Blair, Grant Pattison, Tom Arthur, Nancy Bettinger and Debbie Rathnam). The focus of the discussions was on based on Christian practices and we asked the following questions: “Who are we? Who do we want to be? Who is God calling us to be?” More than 15 small groups met and reported their conversations. Mat MacIver, (Chairperson), distilled the conversations into a two-page final report in February of 2011, which is posted on the HCC website.

During that time, as insights unfolded, the Executive Council and the leadership of the church used much of the uncovered information to guide us in making changes in our staffing, making changes in our ministries, and creating the profile of our church for the Senior Pastor Search Committee, (led by Rowland Bates), to use as they searched for our new minister. Information gathered from that process is still being used today as we make decisions and lead the church. However, early in

2011, as the church transitioned from Diane Mix's ministry into what became a two-year Interim time-period, leadership decided to hold off on making any permanent decisions about how these conclusions translate to our vision for the future until we had found our new Senior Pastor.

In summary, what emerged from our many meetings from 2009 to 2011 is that what makes us most proud of our church is our dedication to service, (mission and outreach), and our music ministry. What we heard God asking us to improve upon at that time was our commitment to hospitality and welcoming measures, to really live the word of our welcoming statement, and to gather together in community in meaningful, joyful and spiritual Sunday worship. These identified themes were heard consistently and permeated throughout most of the conversations, but were not intended to exclude other important Christian practices.

In addition to the sentiments that were identified during discernment a few years ago, the Senior Pastor Search Committee, during their process, noted one other strong insight. What emerged from their experience in talking to the congregation was that we are deeply spiritual and desire strong Christian Education and spiritual development opportunities. We wanted a minister who could lead us more deeply into a rich spiritual journey.

As the Long Range Planning Team conducted our extensive interviews with the congregation, the above sentiments continued to bubble up. It became clear that we have remained consistent and are still the church that we identified ourselves to be a few years ago. Our Senior Pastor, Rev. Pete has been completely supportive of the sentiments learned from our discernment process and has incorporated that information into his ministry. He led 3 sermons in January of 2014 reminding us of those discernment insights.

However, the strongest over-arching theme that we discovered was that so many of the congregation's ideas reflected what a caring community we are and that the congregation wants to strengthen that. From Called-to-Care, to warmly welcoming new members, to providing intergenerational fellowship opportunities, to creating dignified access

to the church for our physically challenged friends, to becoming more intentional about caring for the environment and “greening” up the church, to becoming more intentional about loving and honoring our gay and lesbian friends and strengthening our commitment to our Open and Affirming statement, so many ideas pointed to the fact that we love and care deeply about our congregation, our community, our environment, our neighbors, friends, nation and the world.

During our Long Range Planning meetings, this sentiment became so clear that we remembered an old brochure of ours that called our church, “A Church with a Heart in the Heart of Hingham”.

***In this one statement, we believe that when asked who we are, that we all can respond truthfully: We are the Hingham Congregational Church, “The Church with a Heart in the Heart of Hingham.”***



## **What Does the Congregation Believe We Should Do To Get From Good to Great?**

In order to determine what we should do to go from Good to Great, the Long Range Planning Team conducted extensive interviews. As mentioned in the introduction of this report, the LRPT met with 22 boards, committees, ministries of the church and our staff. We met at the church, in people's homes and at Linden Ponds. We held 3 after-church open forums, conducted an on-line anonymous survey, and invited personal conversations with team members. The team also reached out to organizations, businesses, our own UCC resources, and other churches to gather community input. We also posted flip chart sheets all around the vestry with the masses of ideas we were collecting and invited written reaction from the congregation during coffee hour.

In all, we collected and compiled almost 50 pages of raw data. This raw data is posted on the church website for those who wish to look it over.

The Long Range Planning Team then met over the summer to distill the information, sort it, and look for common themes and directives throughout the input from the congregation.

\* The frequency of facility improvements was the most prevalent of all the ideas that were expressed during our interviews. Updating our vestry/fellowship hall, the kitchen, and bathrooms, were the most frequently raised concerns for achieving a welcoming approach and accommodating a growing church. These concerns were followed closely by other facility concerns: more dignified access to the sanctuary and throughout the church and property, a teen space, an outdoor play space for children, and a landscape plan, (exterior improvements).

\* The congregation also frequently asked for more staff to accomplish more of our goals and support Rev. Pete, (an associate pastor, etc.), updated music and expanded music programs, more and different types of worship opportunities.

\* Also high up on the list were ideas around service: more service opportunities, more outreach activities, more hands-on interaction with the organizations we support, creating an inviting place in our church for hosting meals for the needy, etc.

\* There was frequent mention for more spiritual programming as well, interfaith programs, programs involving youth, more dynamic church school, women's spirituality opportunities, etc.

\* Also frequently brought up were ideas around fellowship: more fun/fellowship and food activities, more church sponsored activities for the community, and intergenerational programs.

\* Next were ideas around being more intentional about the environment, and ideas about strengthening our commitment to our Open and Affirming policies.

\* There was some frequency in ideas around concern for our financial future and for reviewing and potentially updating our governance system.

\* Lastly, there were many ideas that had to do with updating and improving our use of technology, social media, communications options, etc.

From that first attempt at sorting, we then noticed 4 general themes or directives throughout all of the feedback. They are:

- 1. Worship, Music and Spiritual Experiences**
- 2. Christian Education/Programming/Spiritual growth**
- 3. Welcoming/Hospitality/Fellowship**
- 4. Service/Outreach**

## **WORSHIP, MUSIC AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES**

1. The congregation is looking for other forms of worship, including more opportunities for different times and/or places.
2. More music offerings that included more people, (youth for example).
3. More/other voices in worship.

## **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/PROGRAMMING/SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

1. Better facilities to support church school and spiritual growth.
2. Dynamic church school teachers.
3. Expand Christian Education staffing.
4. More small group spiritual growth opportunities.

## **HOSPITALITY/WELCOMING/FELLOWSHIP**

1. Facilities to support fellowship and hospitality both inside and out.
2. Dignified accessibility for all.
3. More small group fellowship opportunities.
4. More intergenerational fellowship opportunities.
5. Strengthen our commitment to our Open and Affirming stance.
6. Increase ministerial staffing to support the congregation with pastoral care, etc.

## **SERVICE/OUTREACH**

1. Better facilities to support service initiatives.
2. More local outreach.
3. More outreach opportunities for youth and adults.
4. More hands-on outreach.

In addition to the above key themes, there were some operational ideas prevalent among the feedback as well:

1. Becoming a “Greener” church.
2. Improving our use of technology, website, communications, etc.
3. Look into other more updated church governance styles.
4. Facilities maintenance, including consistent cleaning of facilities.
5. Adequate office staff to handle the upcoming changes.
6. A review of our budget/stewardship/endowment and memorial process.

Weaving what we learned from the “Who” section of this report in with this “What” section, we then were able to formulate recommendations to the Executive Council. Those recommendations are listed in the “How” section of this report.

## How Do We Accomplish These Goals?

It was clear that many of the ideas and insights that emerged from the congregation were things that fall neatly into the responsibilities of the current boards and committees of our church governance. The Long Range Planning Team constructed careful reports for each board that contained all the suggestions from the congregation that would be of interest to that board and fall within their jurisdiction. The boards were asked to look at the feedback and sort it themselves into categories of ideas that can be accomplished right away, ideas that can be incorporated into a long range plan, ideas that do not make sense or do not fit with the mission of Hingham Congregational Church and therefore require no action, and ideas that should be implemented by another ministry.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on our findings, the Long Range Planning Team is making 10 recommendations:

1. That a former slogan used on much of our past literature, **“A Church with a Heart in the Heart of Hingham”** be re-adopted as our core sentiment. It should be included on our stationary, our communications, our website, and our literature. It should be part of our new branding. This sentiment truly fits who we are today and we recommend that we use it to connect our past history to the strong future we see for the church. We recommend that this sentiment be woven throughout all church policy, processes, and procedures.
2. **That the Boards of Stewardship, Deacons, (which includes the Welcoming Committee, and the Music Committee), Fellowship, Outreach, Christian Education, and Trustees accept the reports that the Long Range Planning Team prepared for them** and begin to sort the data into 3 areas: 1. Ideas that will be implemented immediately, 2. ideas that will be implemented as part of long range goals, and 3. ideas that require no action if the board sees no value in

implementing them. The boards will report to Executive Council with these action choices by the November Executive Council meeting so that any potential budget increase requests can be submitted to the Treasurer and the Finance Committee for consideration during the budgeting process.

3. That the Executive Council appoint a **Buildings and Grounds Task Force**. This task force will be for the purpose of creating a renovation plan for our current church and property. This committee would work closely with the Trustees, but this is too big a project to add onto the Trustees long list of on-going responsibilities. This task force will consist of 3 or 4 volunteers and include at least one member of the Long Range Planning Team for consistency. This task force will report to the Executive Council.

4. That the Executive Council appoint a **Capital Campaign Task Force**, (we suggest calling it the **Heart of Hingham Campaign**), to begin the process of raising money for proposed renovations once the Building and Grounds Task Force has proposed plans. This task force will work closely with the Board of Stewardship and our Treasurers. This task force will consist of 3 or 4 volunteers and include at least one member of the Long Range Planning Team for consistency. This task force will report to the Executive Council.

5. That the Executive Council appoint a **Governance Task Force** to explore new and perhaps more current ways of governing our church. This task force will consist of 3 or 4 volunteers and include at least one member of the Long Range Planning Team for consistency. This task force will report to the Executive Council.

6. That the Executive Council appoint a **Staffing Task Force** to look closely at our staffing needs based on the long range planning feedback of current and future needs. Based on their findings, this task force may become a Search Committee with the goal of hiring an associate pastor or any other potential staff that they deem a priority for accomplishing the goals of our congregation. This task force will consist of 3 or 4 volunteers and include at least one member of the Long Range Planning Team for consistency. This task force will report to the Executive Council.

7. That the Executive Council appoint an **Open and Affirming Task Force** to explore ways in which our congregation can enrich our commitment to our Open and Affirming, (ONA) policy, through education, programming, events, research into practices of other churches, and the like. This task force will consist of 3 or 4 volunteers and include at least one member of the Long Range Planning Team for consistency. This task force will report to the Executive Council.
  
8. Since becoming a **“greener” church** and being more attentive to our environment and the Earth is a goal that actually permeates throughout all the boards, committees, ministries and concerns of the church, instead of creating a task force for this item, we suggest that the Executive Council appoint one Member-at-Large already sitting on the Council to specialize in this concern. He/she will consistently remind the boards and committees to be more mindful of our earth, and will be asked to give the Executive Council a progress report each month. This should be an all-church focus or theme for this programming year at least.
  
9. That the Long Range Planning Team will help find **volunteers to staff the above recommended task forces** and one member of the LRP team will serve on each task force.
  
10. Finally, when the above recommendations are implemented, that the Executive Council and church staff be responsible for all follow-up in terms of seeing the goals through. Therefore, the **Long Range Planning Team can be de-commissioned.**

## When Can We Start?

With approval from Executive Council and the congregation, the Long Range Planning Team will begin staffing the task forces right away. Once staffed, the task forces will be asked to begin their mission as soon as possible and the Long Range Planning Team can disband. The task forces are expected to be in place and the Long Range Planning Team can be de-commissioned by the end of 2014.

The boards and committees have already been asked to start implementing any ideas that they see fit during this programming year. They've also been asked to create goals for the future based on the congregational feedback. They should have an action plan in place by the November 2014 Executive Council meeting so that the Finance Committee can properly prepare the 2015 budget.

The Executive Council has already approved of re-adopting the core sentiment, "A Church With a Heart in the Heart of Hingham." Work on infusing that sentiment into our branding has already started.

We envision a church renovation proposal prepared for the congregation by spring 2015, and a capital campaign kick off at that time as well. We hope to have recommendations from the Governance Task Force, the Staff Task Force, and the Open and Affirming Task Force by late spring, in time for the May Annual Meeting of 2015.

### **In Conclusion:**

*While this may be the end of this Long Range Planning report, this is only the beginning of the work that the church needs to do in order to become the church we have implored ourselves to be. Each Board and Task Force will be coming to the Executive Council for further approvals for action, and some action items will need congregational approval, such as potential church renovations, budget increase requests, etc.*

*Therefore, each member of this congregation will ultimately be asked to continue to be part of this process in order to accomplish our goals and move forward to becoming the extraordinary church we all want us to be. Thank you.*