

**The Congregational Church of West Medford, United Church of Christ
dba Sanctuary UCC**

**Call to Reconvene the 2018 Annual Congregational Visioning Meeting
Sunday, March 31, 10:00 am – 2:30 pm (Scroll Down for Agenda)**

West Medford Community Center, 111 Arlington Street, Medford, MA

**Attendees: Wendy Miller Olapade, Bruce Roberts, Joanna Begin, Erin Sennott, Branwen Cook, Jeffrey Smith, Charlene Carle, Fraelean Curtis, Carvina Williams, Aaron J. Olapade, Tom Gerstabuer, Julie Roberts, Joanna Ostrander, Kathy Williams, Gini B, Paul Roberts, Annamarie Ross Shea
Lisa Parker, Marie Cavanan, Liz Douglass, Amy**

Wendy opened the meeting.

Joanna read the call:

The Officers and Leadership Circle of the Congregational Church of West Medford dba Sanctuary UCC issue this call to reconvene the 2018 Annual Congregational Visioning Meeting on Sunday, March 31 at 10 am to be held at West Medford Community Center, 111 Arlington Street, Medford.

Background and Introduction

This meeting was originally called to order on Sunday, November 18, 2018 at 3:00 pm and suspended at 5:30 pm by a vote of the congregation; reconvened on Saturday, January 05 at 10:00 am and suspended at 1:00 pm by a vote of the congregation with the expectation that the meeting would reconvene as per this call.

- The initial call and agenda for the November 18, 2018 Annual Visioning Meeting can be found [here](#). The outcome of that meeting was a call to a) continue the Restorative Circle process initiated therein; b) deepen and widen congregational discernment about the future; and c) embark on a smaller group circle meeting to address some of the ongoing conflict.
- The call and the agenda for the January 5, 2019 meeting to reconvene the 2018 Annual Visioning Meeting can be found [here](#). The outcomes of that meeting were affirmative votes on:
 - *Item 1, spending for additional Restorative Circles facilitation;*
 - *Item 2, operate on 2018 budget guidelines until the Visioning and Annual Meetings could be called and completed; and*
 - *Item 3, extend deadline for Annual Congregational Meeting, 2019 Budget and Nominating process for three and no more than 6 months.*

While the Leadership Circle and Concerned Members of Sanctuary group have continued to seek conflict resolution via facilitated Restorative Circles the Leadership Circle has determined that Sanctuary must proceed as soon as possible with the 2018 Annual Visioning Meeting (A Way Forward) so that the congregation might consider Sanctuary's future, meet Sanctuary's organizational and fiscal obligations, and care for Sanctuary's spiritual well-being.

This meeting will use the facilitated, Restorative Circles process with which we have been engaged and will implement Reflective Listening throughout the gathering. The agenda and schedule for this meeting will include the goals of the initial call, organized into the following agenda:

Agenda

A Way Forward – Honing and Clarifying the Mission, Vision and Ministry of Sanctuary through Discernment

1. (10:00 am to 11:30 am) **“What do you want for Sanctuary?”** – *Large Group, with facilitated reflective listening*
2. (11:30 am to 1:00 pm) **“What will you commit to Sanctuary’s ministries?”** – *Lunch Circle Table, practicing reflective listening*
3. (1:00 pm to 2:30 pm) **“What do we need to be Sanctuary?”** (staff, space, ministry models, leadership) – *Large Group with facilitated reflective listening; including:*
 - Discussion and a vote on Leadership Circle’s recommendation that Sanctuary release LYS as a ministry of Sanctuary.

Joanna asked for a vote. Branwen moved. All in favor. None opposed. Vote passed unanimously.

Wendy continued the liturgy.

Renewing our commitment:

One: Members and partners of Sanctuary are expected to support the mission and purpose; to share in the life, work, ministries and programs; contribute to its support and benevolences through commitments of time, talent and treasure; and to care for its spiritual welfare. Will you pledge your spiritual, social and financial support to Sanctuary?

All: I will, with God’s help.

From the Moderator:

Joanna read the LC note regarding LYS. Over the last month the LC and LYS have started to reach a mutual agreement to launch the LYS program. We received the proposal about a week and a half ago; Joanna and Bruce have been in discussion for much longer. This launch will release LYS as a 501c3 or to a parent partner.

The Leadership Circle wants to withdraw the recommendation to release Lakota YouthStay (LYS) as a program of Sanctuary UCC for the meeting today. The LC will call a special congregational meeting no later than June 9, 2019 to discuss a formal plan to release and launch the LYS program.

The recommendation is withdrawn.

Wendy explained the process for the meeting today:

1. What do you want for Sanctuary?
2. What will you commit to Sanctuary’s ministries?
3. What do we need to be Sanctuary?

Wendy encouraged everyone to reflect on values, vision, heart and to think about why are we doing this and why are we here today.

Wendy shared the basis for the original vote of reimagining a new way of being as Sanctuary UCC. Original values and the vision document voted on by the congregation in 2015 can be found [here](#).

Wendy recapped our shared values:

1. Unity in Essentials, Diversity in non-essentials, Charity in all things
2. Transparency and Healthy Communication
3. UCC – Centered in the people, congregational polity, non-creedal, leadership is decentralized
4. Our Theology is Progressive; and that means:
 - God is Still Speaking
 - We are engaged in the “Emerging/Converging” conversation
 - Is a theology that invites questions
 - Experiential and Experimental
 - Includes diverse and wide ranging spiritual practices; including practices from other faith walks and traditions
 - The Pastor is coach and teacher and empowers others to use their gifts to achieve our mission
 - You can discover your faith here
 - Worship and Relationships are heartfelt
 - Worship and Ministry are Interactive
 - Everybody is welcome at the table
 - We do not: Judge, Exclude, Consider scripture to be inerrant or the absolute truth, Tell you what to believe
 - As congregationalists we are not: Hierarchical, “Evangelical” with an uppercase E, focused on Doctrine
5. Open and Affirming
6. Jesus Followers – we Love God, love neighbor as yourself

7. Action, Mission and Justice Oriented (Local AND Non Local (Pine Ridge)
 - Environmental, economic, racial, gender, sexual, educational justice matter
8. Committed to Community, Connection and Collaboration
 - Sharing the load
 - It takes a village
 - Seeking and Building Partnerships across the City and the World
9. Micah 8: Seek Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly with God
10. Multicultural, Multiracial
11. Worship needs to be about:
 - Sacred – Experience God/The Holy
 - Considers the mystical, mystery and beauty of God
 - Include Threshold moments that move us from our lives to experience of the Holy
 - Forgiveness-Reconciliation
 - Beloved-ness
 - Everybody included, everybody involved
 - Moves us from head to heart (18”)
 - Music opens the soul to God, includes multiple genres and is easy to sing
 - Reflects our context – neighbors
 - Joyful
 - Includes Story and Witness
 - Includes Confession
 - Includes Communion
 - Is Challenging and Intelligent

Wendy recapped the vision for the future:

- a. We are and will be a progressive, Christian community that experiences the sacred in everyday, ordinary moments;
- b. We will build loving relationships with God and each other;
- c. We will discover old and new spiritual practices that leave us refreshed and inspired.
- d. We are a rag tag, wildly diverse group of questioners and believers (and everything in between); who are forming faith at home and together through
 - a. worship,
 - b. ritual,
 - c. prayer,
 - d. practice,
 - e. service, and
 - f. study.
- e. We will make a difference in the lives of people who would not ordinarily come to “Church” but who will find “church” in us.
- f. We will create threshold moments where the stuff of our regular lives becomes the stuff of holiness and grace.
- g. We will experience joyous, heartfelt, intelligent and participatory worship that challenges and amazes and puts us in touch with God.
- h. We will be a community that is called to care—everyone.
- i. We will be place where there are no barriers to entry

- j. We will sometimes offer classic forms of worship where we will go to a sanctuary somewhere and have an order of worship and pray the way we love to pray and sing hymns and hear “The Word.”
- k. And we will create new ways of praising God—through new forms of worship, grounded in old liturgy and our story, with music and singing and expressions that are organic to who we are; and other new forms like online practices, drop in meditation, experiences of faith through Art and Nature and Literature; and spiritual study groups that do not look like church as we know it, but that bring us in touch with our Creator.
- l. We will move out of our big, beautiful building and building bold, beautiful big-ness on the move.
- m. We will have a welcoming ministry center in the public square that offers hospitality seven days a week--where people can drop in to laugh and cry and find a faith that works for them.
- n. We will act in many ways that expresses what we stand for—we will be “those Christians” that advocate for justice and make a difference in the lives of people in need, that feed the hungry and clothe the naked and take seriously Jesus’ call to love our neighbor.
- o. We will be a people so blessed, so transformed by our experience of being a part of this vision –that we cannot help but invite others to join us on the journey! And people will want to join us because they want what we have and want to be like us

We are still allowing the shaping and shifting to happen because we are a laboratory – always changing.

Everyone read aloud together the Welcome printed in the bulletin:

Sanctuary United Church of Christ is a diverse community of action-oriented followers of Jesus, who humbly strive through worship, faith formation and the practice of Jesus' teachings to love God and our neighbors as God loves us.

God calls us to care for and meet people where they are; share a life of prayer and joyful service with all; and together – worship, rest in, and serve God. We are seekers of justice and lovers of all of God's creation. Through the community formed by the Holy Spirit, we are consoled, forgiven, refreshed and inspired.

We extravagantly welcome all people; believers, non-believers, doubters, questioners no matter who they love, their gender identity or expression, their race, culture, ability, or economic circumstance. All are a blessing to our journey of faith and we seek to share God's love and grace with all.

Wendy introduced Sarah-Elizabeth.

Sarah-Elizabeth said the smaller group is making good progress, which has also helped Joanna and Bruce move discussions further.

Joanna, Wendy, and Sarah-Elizabeth led the small group discussions to help model reflective listening.

What do you want/vision for Sanctuary?		
Home	Love neighbors	Worship and sacred space
Support	Affirm the vision for Crossroads	Connecting our youth
Pastor – connection to another faith community	A soft place to land but challenge of being sent	Music and connection to Protestant church to heritage and leads us into the future
Continue the work of Next in place	Pain about triangulation in alignment of LYS & Sanctuary	Clear, faithful, healthy, and transparent communication
Balance between physical space (pastor, laity) and spiritual place	Pain about possible ... people to save	Balance of outward and inward
Be Sanctuary	Shared experience and ritual that holds us together	Social Justice → being fed by faith
Feed through Spirit and other practice to be able to serve others (meaning and purpose)	See the value of outreach	Care of others → Care of God
Be Sanctuary with LYS launch	Growth to share the aspirational vision of being Sanctuary	
Hold members in covenant	Justice	

What do you want/vision for Sanctuary?

Energy of Sanctuary is kind, caring, gentle among each other while the higher power dancing among one another

Kind, caring, community that spreads out and returns (breathing in and out)

Safe space for dialogue

Strengthening hearts and souls through dialogue

Worship – expand how this connects and grounds our community

Joining with other congregations across faiths

Love for each other strengthened

Notice “the obstacle is the path” we chose. People don't know each other

Build bridges between ministries through love

Need for a bigger place for everyone to gather

Whole community gathering at once

Practice and experience, explore relationship with God

Cultivate a space for families to connect with wider community

Intergenerational community

Live the open, affirming, and welcoming vision of Sanctuary

What do you want/vision for Sanctuary?

Community connection (outward energy)

Space to grow in your own faith journey (inward facing)

Chosen home

Soft place to land

Be seen, heard, and loved through the eyes of God

Worship is a multi-way conversation

Serve our neighbors (whomever they may be)

Create family and community – give and take so children can learn from everyone

Diverse community

Find personal fulfillment

Learn about each other; connect to each others' lives

Challenge ourselves to be open and vulnerable when we participate

You are missed; you are needed (no pew sitters)

Lunch was in three small group settings to discuss the program insert which posed the question: What will you commit to Sanctuary's ministries?

The last session was as one large group in which everyone discussed the question: What do we need to be Sanctuary?

What do we need to be Sanctuary?

Worship

Ritual, music, classic forms of worship are missing

Do we need to practice/experiment with other models of worship and other voices? More weird?

Volunteers that can help design/create worship?

Various perspectives on theology (queer, womanist, etc.) – craft a worship experience that might highlight one of these theological perspectives

Worship through music – “music church” – live music

Create a worship team? – Various worship experiences (hike, etc.)

Different forms of worship – can use gifts of all/many for lay-led worship

How we gather

- Purpose
- Who needs to be in the room
- Worship in many places to meet God
- Host has a role to invite the purpose and guests are protected

Broaden the model to meet people where they are

What do we need to be Sanctuary?

Fellowship

Breakfast church was initially intended to be more social; now it's more worship-centered = could be more social with less liturgy

Share deeply in worship through questions and prayer; we know each other deeply but not as socially; we know one another's hearts – the “human” things aren't known

Need for both social and deep connections

Success

Where is success?

- Worship – deep?
- Financially
- Engagement
- Use of space
- Visibility of our model – find partners
- Art engagement
- Social justice
- Civic leadership
- Elders
- Prayer life (in worship)
- Music (musicians)
- Children
- Youth

What do we need to be Sanctuary?

Roles/Programs

- Traditional deacon role is missing
- There are gaps that deacons used to fill (prayer, hospitality)
- Add service opportunities – what is the role for Sanctuary that will fill the gap?
- Spiritual direction program – prayer, meditation, renewal
- Prayer life – prayer group, formal Bible study
- Messy church is blooming – can this be regular

Community/Body

- A fully functioning body – rest in God, fed by God and each other, serve our neighbor
- Physical time and space to gather all of Sanctuary – to be fed by the connection and God = and identity is formed
- “Who prays for Sanctuary?” – how do we make time to pray for the work?
- Meeting people where they are – some are not yet able to be fully present in our deep model
- Are we falling in love with God?
- Align with vision, purpose, values
- Exercise questioning, develop faith

What do we need to be Sanctuary?

Fellowship

- Breakfast church was initially intended to be more social; now it's more worship-centered = could be more social with less liturgy
- Share deeply in worship through questions and prayer; we know each other deeply but not as socially; we know one another's hearts – the “human” things aren't known
- Need for both social and deep connections
- We know one another's hearts through intentional time in worship

Success

- Where is success?
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