

# **Living the Vision for Renewal and Growth**



**in the Massachusetts Conference  
of the United Church of Christ  
September 2002**



# MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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September, 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is with immense hopefulness that we offer this revised edition of *A Vision for Renewal and Growth*. So much has been accomplished since the first edition was published in 2000! The *Vision for Renewal and Growth* has become a part of our lives in remarkable ways. It has guided and informed the work of the Board of Directors and the Commissions of the Massachusetts Conference. It has and continues to find its way into the life of our churches. We are better, stronger, and more faithful because of it.

The *Vision* called upon us to enter into a time of experimentation. And we have been experimenting in each of the four identified initiatives: 1) leadership development; 2) evangelism, mission and justice; 3) ministry with youth and young adults and, 4) use of 21<sup>st</sup> technologies. I hope you will read in the following pages the report and updates about all that has been accomplished.

In the area of leadership development, we are resourcing our clergy and living out creative partnerships with various church-related institutions. We are learning to be light on our feet, flexible and adaptable in how we respond to new and sometimes urgent requests from our clergy and churches.

The *Vision* invited us to dream of new ways to explore mission and evangelism. Today we have evangelism coaches and justice coaches out in our churches, training, challenging, and encouraging us to speak and live our faith in exciting ways. We have congregations and clergy that are risking, stretching, testing new ways to live out their Christian discipleship.

We have new and expanding programs and ministries with youth and young adults. We are hearing from them and learning from them about their needs, their language, their desire to be faithful and transforming Christians.

We have made tremendous strides in communicating the gospel with the use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. Many, perhaps most of our churches are exploring and exploiting the use of e-mail, PowerPoint, Web pages, and the Internet. The use of technology has brought our Conference of churches together, lessening the geographic distances between east and west, north and south.

We are still dreaming, still experimenting, still evaluating, still listening together to the calling of God. But this much is clear: the *Vision* continues to beckon us forward toward a more courageous, inspired, and faithful discipleship. I hope you will help us to carry the *Vision* even further into the life of our congregations to help us transform our churches and our world in the name of Christ.

Faithfully,

Nancy S. Taylor  
Minister and President

# ***A Vision for Renewal and Growth*** **In the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ**

## *Background*

Following the decision by the Board of Directors in October 1997 to engage in a strategic planning process for the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ, a Strategic Planning Team of 26 people was formed and began to meet in March, 1998. Representing clergy and laity, churches large and small, rural and urban, located in all areas of the Conference, the Team gathered, organized and analyzed information around strengths, programs, ministries, dreams, wishes, and needs of our Conference churches. They reflected on the widely-held identifying characteristics of the Massachusetts Conference: covenant, inclusiveness and diversity, unity, and concern for social justice. They identified several of the challenges our churches face: the vitality and vibrancy of congregations; demographic shifts which can bring about new and different growth, but which may cause some churches to disband; the “unreached” – more people *not* in church than *in* church; the lack of denominational loyalty; the lack of financial resources.

With the purpose of building on and deepening the special identifying characteristics of our United Church of Christ identity, *A Vision for Renewal and Growth* sought to provide resources, programs, and staff support which would help local congregations respond to the Spirit’s leading and fulfill their full potential as communities in Christ. Four action initiatives were recommended. To expand these beginnings and assess the proposed initiatives, “The Path” recommended a period of experimentation to help equip churches and members to think in new ways.

*A Vision for Renewal and Growth* was “a road map and not an operational plan”, the beginning of a new process of seeking God’s leading for our Conference and churches. In this *Living the Vision*, the original recommendations on the four initiatives are presented with corresponding updates. Some recommendations proved to be successful, others not. New ideas and initiatives continue to evolve in this period of experimentation. In this new document the undergirding assumptions on Stewardship and United Church of Christ identity have been articulated. Suggestions for participation by local churches are presented. May God continue to guide our way as we are *Living the Vision*.

## ***Living the Vision***

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## INITIATIVE ONE UPDATE – LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

### Prophets and Poets; Players and Dinosaur Slayers: Leadership *for the Millennium*

Churches change from the center outward, from the leadership to the congregation. No congregation can dream larger or risk more than its leadership, both clergy and lay. **We strongly urge laity and clergy to prepare themselves for new ways of leading that will enable our congregations to identify and act on new opportunities.**

1. **PROVIDE SUPPORT, TRAINING, AND MENTORING** for clergy and lay leaders, who are creative open to innovation, and eager to explore new styles of leadership.

*Three “Clergy Colloquies” have been held during 2001 and 2002 that engaged clergy in worship, Bible Study, networking and learning. Focus areas have included (1) a response to the September 11, 2001 tragedy; (2) skill building for conflict and transformation in a local church setting; and (3) resources for clergy confidentiality and privileged communication in a pastoral setting. Five “Clergy Colloquies” have been planned for Fall, 2002 to focus on wellness and boundaries for clergy and congregations in pastoral settings. **It is recommended that colloquies focusing on issues of concern and innovation be held on a regular basis throughout the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ.***

*A grant for Pastoral Excellence that would focus on clergy newly ordained for less than five years and serving in a parish setting has been submitted to the Lilly Foundation. A trained and experienced pastor would lead these small group ministries with a curriculum that would support and enhance parish ministry. At the publication of this document we are unsure of the funding, but we are sure of the commitment to carry forth with this thrust.*

*The “Learning to Teach” educational ministry program has been developed for Christian educators to develop skills and resources to enhance their leadership within church school environments. The pilot was held during winter and spring of 2002 and phase two will begin in 2003. **It is recommended that Christian educators take advantage of the “Learning to Teach” program.***

*Nurturing and creating a safe environment for children and the clergy and volunteers who serve them has been an ongoing training opportunity for the last six years. Workshops and resources continue to be held and distributed throughout the Conference. In light of the present environment in the Commonwealth, **it is recommended that leaders of program ministries in all settings create policies and procedures so that risk for abuse will be minimized.***

*A preaching and worship leadership symposium has been designed to encourage and enhance the leadership in these important areas of ministry. This all-Conference event will be held in the Fall of 2002.*

*A spiritual Nurture Formation Focus Group composed of clergy has been created, for the purpose of education and support. A directory of resources, spiritual directors and retreat sites will be created during the winter of 2003.*

- 2. ENTER INTO RELATIONSHIPS** with Andover Newton, the Boston Theological Institute, the Alban Institute and other organizations to develop curricula and programs.

*The Andover Newton Spring Convocation, Confirmation programs, adult formation and gift identification programs are mutually sponsored and supported through shared program leadership and publicity. **It is recommended that as many program as possible continue to be held in conjunction with other organizations or program entities.***

*Members of the executive staff of the Conference meet monthly to present case studies for consultation and skill development with a senior consultant from the Alban Institute staff. **It is recommended that case studies be used in as many settings as possible as a means for learning and growth.***

- 3. ESTABLISH CONGRUENT ASSOCIATION-WIDE STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS** for ordained, licensed and commissioned ministers for ongoing professional development and continuing education, peer evaluations and re-certification.

*Members of the Commission for Leadership Development are gathering and creating new tools for evaluation of clergy and local church ministry. Publication of these resources is targeted for spring, 2003.*

*Certification for Church Educators working full time in a local church setting will continue to be encouraged and supported by Conference staff. Completion of the process will be recognized as one model for continuing education for church leaders.*

*The second focus of the Lilly Grant proposal is to work directly with the eleven Church and Ministry Committees of the Conference. This direction will inform each of the committees of mutual concerns and procedures. **It is recommended that a Conference-wide continuing education program for all clergy newly ordained and new to the Massachusetts Conference be instituted.***

- 4. WORK WITH LOCAL CHURCHES TO IDENTIFY AND CALL LEADERS BY THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.**

*Commission members of the Conference will be encouraged to participate in a Spiritual Gift inventory to assess their gifts for ministry in a Conference setting. Gift inventories continue to be gathered and assessed to be made available to local church leaders for their use. **It is recommended that workshops and training continue to be held.***

- 5. IDENTIFY AND LEARN FROM THE MOST INNOVATIVE AND HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS ...**who can serve as teaching settings or models of best practices.

*Local churches continue to be identified and networked with other congregations to “raise the bar” of creative and innovative programs. **It is recommended that when possible congregations be gathered for mutual support and creative sharing through focus groups and regional gatherings.***

## INITIATIVE TWO – EVANGELISM, MISSION & JUSTICE MINISTRIES

### *I Love to Tell the Story*

Historically, evangelism was closely linked with mission outreach. Over the years these two areas have become separated, and many congregations have become complacent and too inwardly focused. Education and advocacy for justice and peace also require that we look and reach outward. **We strongly urge the reintegration of evangelism and mission and the nurturing of local church vision that is energetically focused on spreading the gospel, serving God’s people, and striving for a just and peaceful world.**

To help churches grow in vitality and to reach out in new ways the Strategic Planning Team recommends that the Massachusetts Conference:

1. **TRAIN EVANGELISM ASSOCIATES**, lay and clergy consultants, who will build on the work of current task teams for church growth and development and work hand-in-hand with church leaders.

*Trained coaches are now working with over 60 congregations in a program called “Vital Congregational Life”. This effort focuses on spiritual renewal, small group ministry and outreach. More churches are joining this program in the fall of 2002 and many churches are at beginning points of transformation. It is recommended that “Vital Congregational Life” continue and be supplemented by further programming in a variety of church systems models.*

2. **ENCOURAGE LOCAL CHURCHES TO PLANT A MINIMUM OF 10 NEW CHURCHES IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS** with special attention given to starting ethnic minority churches.

*Using Percept demographics and other research the “Top 12” potential locations for new church starts have been developed. In addition, procedures have been implemented for identifying and training new church start pastors. Creative funding for future starts is also in process as funding has proved to be a distinct obstacle. It is recommended that new models for church starts be explored and that partnering with local churches and Associations be encouraged.*

3. **USE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA** from sources such as *Percept* to understand the context in which we will do our future work. *Percept*, a national resource center, provides demographic information to aid in the interpretation of mission and ministry possibilities of church leaders.

*Local churches have been encouraged to access and use Percept demographic data made available through the Conference to learn about their community and its makeup: age, ethnicity, income levels, family size, activity preferences, spirituality, etc. It is recommended that Percept continue to be provided and that more congregations make use of the material available.*

4. **TRAIN FAITH-IN-ACTION ASSOCIATES** to be articulate advocates for justice and effective organizers for social action.

*In the fall of 2002, coaches are being trained who will work directly with outreach committees around envisioning and mission discernment. They will be deployed in early 2003. It is recommended coaches work with congregations in all five areas of the Conference and coordinate efforts with Evangelism Coaches.*

*Also, in the past two years a Restorative Justice Task Team has been formed and trained and is now working with congregations. The Open and Affirming Task Force is hosting a fundraising event for the Bill Johnson Scholarship Fund and plans are underway for an ONA Arts Festival in the spring of 2003. Our partnership with the Pentecostal Church of Chile has flourished and a new pilot partnership is beginning with the United Church of South Africa. It is recommended that a variety of task teams continue to be formed around key issues and concerns*

5. **IDENTIFY CHURCHES TO SERVE AS MODELS** in the areas of evangelism, mission and justice ministries.

*With the 2002 Annual meeting theme centering on this Initiative, dozens of churches were identified as models of vitality and have been included in panels, Power Point presentations and brochures. Continued work is being done to help each church “tell its story” of evangelism, mission and justice. It is recommended that more of the church’s stories be shared as models for congregations.*

What has been separated for many years will take time to rejoin. In this first phase of reintegration, those working in the areas of mission, social action and justice have learned more about those working in evangelism – and vice versa. The “marriage” envisioned by the Strategic Planning Team is in its “courtship” period. How to make this a lasting relationship is the challenge.

From *A Vision for Renewal and Growth* - The recommendations in this plan are founded on the commitment, which was the cornerstone of the Massachusetts Mission Society in 1799: “to spread the glorious Gospel of Christ...” This ideal from our past is at the heart of our vision for the future. It calls for passion to:

**revitalize our churches**

**start new ministries**

**reach out** to those who have yet to hear the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ

**The Strategic Planning Team urges the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ to reaffirm and reclaim our missionary zeal in new ways for our own day – a zeal that will inspire and transform our churches and our world.**

## **STEWARDSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN CHURCHES AND THE CONFERENCE**

*The need for financial resources to support in the implementation of the four initiatives was a “given” in A Vision for Renewal and Growth and was understood by the Strategic Planning Team to be a cornerstone in all the recommendations. One of the learnings in this period of experimentation is that the subject of Christian stewardship needs further articulation and recommendations.*

In the biblical world, stewardship was about household management, particularly the handling of finances and servants and workers in the household. The Greek word “Oikonomia” meaning “household administration” is the root of our English word “economics.” Often churches have avoided economic questions in their day to day life, thinking that such issues are “unspiritual.” Yet if we believe that God is the creator of all, and that Christ is the word made flesh, we must concern ourselves with the integration of the “spiritual” and the “worldly,” as we accept that the reign of God is to come “on earth as it is in heaven.” In the Bible there are more passages relating to our attitudes about our material possessions than about prayer, love, or believing.

Many church members in our Conference give less than 1% of their income to the church. Many more give less than 2%, which is lower than the 2.5% national average of Protestant giving. Meanwhile some churches are struggling to stay alive. Others have difficulty in providing additional needed funds for growth in staff and facilities. Still others cut their outreach giving, particularly their giving to Our Church’s Wider Mission, in order to fund their internal needs. We strongly urge that the churches of the Massachusetts Conference attend to their finances as a spiritual matter and encourage greater generosity among their members so that the initiatives for renewal and growth can be made a reality.

To help our churches grow more faithful stewards, and to be more faithful stewards, the Stewardship Commission recommends that the Massachusetts Conference:

1. Provide educational opportunities for clergy and laity helping congregations make the connection between spirituality and stewardship.
2. Encourage local churches to teach tithing and proportional giving, stressing the connection between discipleship and generosity.
3. Provide opportunities for clergy to learn how to preach on Christian stewardship and integrate stewardship into the liturgical life of the congregation.
4. Encourage each local church to devote an amount equal to at least 10% of its current local expenditures to total mission giving and to devote at least 50% of its total mission giving to Our Church’s Wider Mission Basic Support.
5. Support local churches in their annual stewardship appeals, capital campaigns, planned giving and special giving, resourcing churches through the sharing of ideas, strategies and materials Conference-wide.

## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IDENTITY

From A Vision for Growth and Renewal: *“The more we know about who we are as members of the United Church of Christ, the clearer we can be about the perspectives, challenges, and opportunities of faith we offer to those who are seeking a faith community. Today many seekers “shop” for the church they consider best suited to their personal needs – regardless of denominational affiliation. We must be prepared to help them discover who we are and what we believe, how that empowers our lives – and how it could empower theirs!”*

The United Church of Christ is a profound contribution to the family of Christian communions. We have shaped a denominational identity that is distinct: congregational based, subject to no temporal authority, responsible to Christ, rooted in the Bible, open to God’s future, reformed and reforming, united and uniting, and ecumenically committed.

We are a people for whom the basic qualities of our organizational life are expressed as **freedom, responsibility and covenant**. This is so, because we deeply **believe that this is how God relates to us: in freedom, responsibility and covenant**. Therefore, we seek to embody these same qualities as we order our common life and as we relate to God and to each other.

It is estimated that perhaps 75% of the people in our pews in Massachusetts do not know they are in a United Church of Christ congregation. Approximately one third of the people in our UCC pews in Massachusetts came to us from another Christian tradition, or with little or no church experience. How can we do a better job of treasuring and transmitting the distinct heritage of the United Church of Christ to the people in our own pews?

We are a denomination compelled by the truths captured in familiar and beloved phrases like “the priesthood of all believers,” “responsible freedom,” and “testimonies of faith.” We are shaped by an eager attentiveness to God’s future, as expressed in the words of pastor John Robinson in 1620: “There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy Word.” We are enriched by four denominational families – Congregational, Christian, Reformed, and Evangelical - each bringing their own gifts and graces to this unique adventure.

To help our congregants explore and understand the rich theological and ecclesiastical heritage of the United Church of Christ, it is recommended:

1. Parish clergy utilize UCC materials in the orientation of new members, Confirmation classes, and adult education. A wealth of resources are available at the UCC Web site at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), follow prompts to "About Us" and "Faith". Additional materials can be found on page 56 in the UCC Desk Calendar or by calling the Massachusetts Conference Resource Center at (508) 875-5233.
2. That our congregations make time in the liturgical year to celebrate our unique and precious heritage perhaps on Amistad Sunday (March 9<sup>th</sup>) or the Sunday nearest the anniversary of the UCC (June 25<sup>th</sup>).
3. That the Massachusetts Conference continue to develop and point to resources that compellingly tell the story of the United Church of Christ.

## INITIATIVE THREE – MINISTRY WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

*And the Post Modernists Will Lead Us*

Creating and carrying out mission and ministry to a new generation of people requires retooling and rethinking. Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976, sometimes called “Baby Busters”) numbers around 50 million. Those in this age group are often described as alienated, cynical, aimless and hurting. They could further be described as hard working and cause driven. Many have very little knowledge or experience with Christianity. “Millennials,” those born after 1976, are the youth that many of us wish to understand better and reach more effectively. **We strongly urge that our churches educate themselves about and explore possibilities for meaningful ministry with these generations of young people.**

To assist our churches in attracting and ministering with these generations, the Strategic Planning Team recommends that the Massachusetts Conference:

- 1. IDENTIFY, RECRUIT AND TRAIN LAY AND CLERGY LEADERS** who are sensitive to the needs and expectations of this generation.

*We continue to offer Education for Effective Youth Ministry (EEYM) to train youth ministers from our local churches. An expanded program will be added for 2002/2003 that will continue this training. Additional programming could include sessions in conjunction with the Princeton Institute for Youth Ministry. It is recommended that we continually identify leaders who are sensitive to the needs of young adults.*

- 2. EXPLORE RESOURCES AND SETTINGS WHERE INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE WORSHIP SPEAKS TO THESE NEEDS.**

*A survey has been completed to determine which of our churches offer alternative worship services. Plans are in the works to cooperate with the Communications Commission to offer an event to focus on contemporary worship, as well as conversations with Andover Newton staff in continuing to develop curriculum resources.*

- 3. ENCOURAGE THE USE OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC** in services of worship that speaks the language and gives voice to the concerns of this generation. *All youth events have included the use of more contemporary music. It is recommended that we develop resources that help our leaders incorporate mainline music into their programming.*
- 4. PROVIDE RESOURCES, WHICH ENABLE CHURCHES TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS** to gather within the context of the faith community to learn about God and community.

*Through the Sarah Field Moore Endowment, we were able to take 25 young adults to the “Come to the Feast” Young Adult Event. They participated in workshops focusing on young adult ministry. It is recommended that we work on ways to facilitate young adult groups/gatherings/events throughout the conference.*

- 5. REFOCUS THE EMPHASIS** of the present Camping and Outdoor Ministry program to provide opportunities for service through hands-on mission.

*This is perhaps our greatest success. We are currently offering a variety of mission trips to expand our Outdoor Ministry program. These have included trips to North Carolina in partnership with Habitat for Humanity and an Interfaith Organization, New York City to serve the homeless, Washington DC to work on hunger issues and Honduras in partnership with Heifer Project International. The Mustard Seed Ministries is being developed to offer an inner city experience that will help youth and young adults become involved in local mission projects. It is recommended that this part of our vision be expanded, and that we develop a core of leader for this important ministry.*

- 6. RAISE THE STATUS OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY** to reflect a viable professional career choice.

*For the first time in many years, the Associate for Youth and Young Adult Ministries has become a full time staff position at the Conference, indicating that this is indeed an important ministry. It is recommended that field education opportunities for seminarians within the field of youth and young adult ministry be developed.*

- 7. IDENTIFY AND LEARN FROM MODELS** across the country where active, vital youth and young adult ministries are taking place.

*It is recommended that we seek sites and individuals that have been successful in establishing ministries with youth and young adults and continue to learn from them even when it may mean taking risks.*

- 8. IDENTIFY, ENCOURAGE AND RECRUIT “UNDER-30” COLLEGE GRADUATES TO ATTEND SEMINARY** to provide leadership with this generation.

*We are working with Andover Newton and their new Recruitment Director to offer some cooperative programs that will help us encourage more young people to attend seminary. It is recommended that we expand our efforts to include other seminaries and institutions of higher learning.*

- 9. STRENGTHEN OUR COVENANT PARTNERSHIPS IN SUPPORT OF CAMPUS MINISTRY.**

*A meeting was held with Boston/Cambridge College Chaplains to begin conversation on how we can work together. This is a group that feels very isolated from clergy. It is recommended that we do more to support them and their ministry.*

## INITIATIVE FOUR UPDATE – USE OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS

### *“Chipping” the Church*

Existing and rapidly emerging technologies are changing the way we communicate with one another. They are redefining how we relate to one another as individuals and as communities, and the ways in which the church “advertises” to the public. Currently, the United Church of Christ in Massachusetts, the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the Commonwealth, is rarely mentioned in the secular print media in the Commonwealth. **We strongly urge the Massachusetts Conference and our member churches to increase their use of computer technology to facilitate the life and ministry in the local church and beyond and to use all media to share stories of our ministries.**

To assist in broadening and improving communication, the Strategic Planning Team recommends that the Massachusetts Conference:

1. **ASSIST LOCAL CONGREGATIONS IN OBTAINING AND USING** both computer hardware and software.

*The Gift and The Promise Campaign has largely made this goal a reality in the Conference. In 2000-2001, 125 churches received grants for computer hardware, software and training and many more attended computer-related training events. Today, 73 percent of Conference churches have their own email addresses, and all but 30 churches have designated a contact person within the congregation to receive emails from the Conference office.*

2. **EXPAND ON-LINE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES** that can be accessed on an as-needed basis by pastors and lay members.

*The Massachusetts Conference Web Site has expanded from a few dozen resource pages in 1999 to nearly 775 pages today. The site continues to be expanded with more materials and resources developed specifically for the website, such as online tutorials and other, more interactive, features.*

3. **POST AND UPDATE INFORMATION ON CONFERENCE AND ASSOCIATION-SPONSORED EVENTS, WORKSHOPS, DISASTER RELIEF AND SOCIAL ACTION INITIATIVES** on its Web Site and provide online registration.

*The Massachusetts Conference Web Site includes extensive lists of Conference-sponsored events, camps, workshops and other activities, and currently provides online registration for free events. Disaster Relief information is available on the national UCC site. It is recommended that the online registration be developed for paid events using online payment options, and that work begin on making the Web site a source for those who wish to get involved in social action.*

4. **USE THE INTERNET TO BUILD NETWORKS** of pastors and laity, creating bulletin boards and chat rooms for affinity groups, adult education, and community organizing for social action.

*Discussion forums (bulletin boards) have been added to the Web Site. It is recommended that more use be made of these discussion forums, and that other methods of building networks, such as list-serves, be explored.*

**5. EXPLORE WAYS TO MAKE USE OF PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS** to tell our story.

*The Massachusetts Conference has made great progress in establishing contacts with representatives of major media outlets in order to tell our story. As “the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the Commonwealth”, comments have been solicited from the Minister and President and she has spoken out on significant issues. This work must continue so that our voice is heard and the stories of our local congregations can continue to be told.*

The Strategic Planning Team also recommends that the 432 local churches of the Massachusetts Conference:

**6. USE THE WORLD WIDE WEB TO INFORM** church members and the local community about events and opportunities, to stay in touch with members unable to attend worship, and to reach prospective members.

*Nearly half of the Conference churches today have Web Sites. It is recommended that these sites be improved and expanded, include links to other sites, and that more churches use this vital form of communication.*

**7. USE EMAIL OR POSTINGS ON SECURE WEB SITES** to maintain “prayer chains” and networks of parish care.

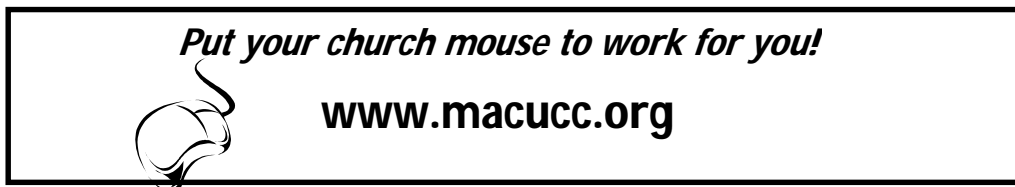
*Numerous churches today are beginning to learn of the myriad of uses for email, including prayer chains. The events of Sept. 11, 2001, reminded many congregations of the need to be able to reach members and as a result more and more congregations are developing email chains. It is recommended that this practice continue.*

**8. USE INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE AND EDUCATIONAL WEB SITES** for Christian education, sermon aids and resources for every aspect of church life.

*Several churches have developed computer labs for use on a rotating basis by their Christian education classes. Others have begun using multi-media as a part of worship. It is recommended that this continue, so that churches can more effectively reach younger generations.*

**9. PARTICIPATE IN THE MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE** of the United Church of Christ, ecumenical alliances and interest groups, social justice networks, and mission sites via the Web.

*The Massachusetts Conference Web Site receives more and more visitors all the time, an indicator that local congregations are using the site. Many congregations also use the Web Sites of the national UCC, Church World Service, the Massachusetts Council of Churches and others. It is recommended that this be continued and expanded.*



## **THE PATH**

### **A PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTATION FOCUSING ON THE FOUR INITIATIVES**

To expand on some projects already in process and assess the proposed initiatives, the Strategic Planning Team recommended a period of experimentation of not less than three years and not more than five years to help equip churches and members to think in new ways how to generate an enthusiasm for mission based on the recommended initiatives

The Strategic Planning Team also proposed the following key events to take place during this time of experimentation:

- A. IN JANUARY 2000, A MEETING WITH CLERGY AND LAY LEADERS WILL BE HELD TO INTRODUCE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS** and plan for the next three to five years.

*Following a January 2000 introductory conference, the staff persons related to each of the four initiatives met with each of the Associations during the Fall and Winter of 2000 - 2001 to introduce the four program areas and to receive comments and feedback.*

- B. FROM 2000-2002, CONGREGATIONS WILL BE INVITED TO ENGAGE IN A TIME OF PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT.** We propose that the Conference designate a special Sunday to start the process. . . During this two year period of "holy boldness," local congregations will be encouraged to do their own envisioning. This strategic plan will serve as a starting point to examine and renew their own ministries.

*Congregations throughout the Conference in each of the Associations have gathered to discern new directions for mission and ministry. Many pastors and church leaders have chosen to utilize the support and research that the Conference has initiatives to build a visioning process for their own directions for the next 3-5 years.*

- C. NOT LATER THAN 2002, THE CONFERENCE WILL HOST AN EVENT FOR CLERGY THAT WILL AFFIRM THEIR ROLE AS PASTORS AND TEACHERS.** Workshops will explore new forms of ministry and leadership that will help them better identify the special gifts of members and equip them for faith and ministry.

*Three clergy colloquies were held during 2001-2002 focusing on current topics of interest utilizing a format that included worship, Bible study, small group discussion, resources, and worships. Colloquies will continue to be held during 2002-2003 through the support of the Commission for Leadership Development.*

- D. NOT LATER THAN 2003, THE CONFERENCE WILL SPONSOR A MAJOR FAITH CELEBRATION EVENT** where workshops will be offered in response to the needs identified by the local congregations.

*A FaithWorks event in May, 2003 in Brockton, Massachusetts event will be sponsored by the Southeast Area and the Massachusetts Conference.*

- E. AS SOON AS THE NEW CONFERENCE MINISTER AND PRESIDENT IS CALLED, THE CONFERENCE WILL INVITE LOCAL CHURCHES TO ENGAGE IN A SERIES OF COVENANT CONVERSATIONS** through Associations to discuss the creative tension of living in covenant with autonomy.

*The Rev. Dr. Nancy Taylor has held days of covenant in each of the five areas of the Conference. When she provides worship leadership in our churches on a regular basis she meets with church leaders following the service of worship.*

## How can your local congregation participate in *Living the Vision for Renewal and Growth*

1. Gather together a group of 3-10 church leaders.
2. Identify what mission and ministry programs you are now doing in your congregation.
3. Review each of the four recommended program initiatives and the underlying **Stewardship** and **UCC Identity** recommendations that are included in this document:

### **Leadership Development** **Evangelism, Mission and Justice Ministries** **Ministry with Gen-X and Millennials** **Use of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communications**

- ◇ *What can you affirm?*
  - ◇ *What are you presently doing that could be included in one or more of the program initiatives?*
  - ◇ *What additional commitments could you make to implement one or more of the program initiatives?*
4. What resources can you identify that will be helpful in implementing these program initiatives?
  5. How can you partner with one or more congregations to carry out this mission and ministry?

Contact your Area Office or Susan P. Dickerman at the Conference Office ([dickermans@macucc.org](mailto:dickermans@macucc.org), 508 875-5233) for help and support to make these congregation connections and to identify resources to carry out these program initiatives.

Additional copies of <i>Living the Vision</i> can be ordered by calling Cindy Bolton at 508-875-5233 or by downloading from the MACUCC Website: <a href="http://www.macucc.org">www.macucc.org</a> .
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***“Behold, I am doing a new thing!”***

**Isaiah 43:19**

**So God proclaims...  
the hope of fresh starts,  
the challenge of exciting possibilities,  
the upheaval of change,  
the promise of a new creation!**

**Empowering our faithfulness in a new millennium,  
God calls us from what is now  
to what is next.**

**Listening for the Spirit’s guidance,  
and building on our churches’ past wisdom  
and present strengths,  
we are living the vision for renewal and growth.**

**As we follow the Spirit’s leading  
in our life and ministries together,  
may God grant us a faith so alive,  
a vision so compelling,  
and a love so strong  
that we, the church, and the world cannot help but  
be transformed!**