

**Report to the Congregation
April 3, 2009**

Overview

This document presents the findings from an eight-month, congregation-wide effort to articulate a vision for the future of Fourth Presbyterian Church. The congregation, clergy, and administrative staff all provided meaningful contributions to shaping and explaining the refreshed statement of the church's vision.

This is a growing and vibrant church community whose members share and now reaffirm their commitment to the church's mission and its programs. Fourth Church is not calling for a radical change of direction.

**Fourth Church is calling for a dramatic expansion of programs,
member involvement, and physical space to better serve the
ministry of Jesus Christ in Chicago and the broader world.**

A Guide to This Report: Its Preparation and Its Uses

While these findings will guide the design and implementation of a long-range plan to bring the vision of the congregation to fruition, they are aspirational and represent goals on which we will begin to work today, but which we may not be able to fully realize until far into the future.

Please take the time to read the following presentation of the Refreshing the Vision effort and summary of the findings. It is our hope that you will be energized and ready to embrace a bold future.

Should you have questions, we encourage you to contact any member of the clergy staff or any member of the Steering Committee.

Sincerely,

Fourth Church Refreshing the Vision Steering Committee.
Andy McGaan and Juli Crabtree, co-chairs

Mark Bereyso
Debbie Bricker
Delia Coleman
Doug Grissom
Elinor Hite
Marilee Hopkins

Maggie Lewis
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

REFRESHING THE VISION CONTEXT	3
INCEPTION OF THE LONG-RANGE PLAN	5
FORMATION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE	5
GOALS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE	5
REFRESHING THE VISION PROCESS	6
RESULTS	6
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN	8
CONCLUSION	9
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
PARTICIPANTS IN THE VISIONING SESSIONS	10
REFRESHING THE VISION TASK TEAMS	10

Refreshing the Vision Context

John Buchanan

March 13, 2009

In the past, important and creative periods in the life of Fourth Presbyterian Church have resulted from a time of reflection, dreaming, visioning, and planning. I well remember when I was in conversation with the Pastor Nominating Committee of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, a church about which I knew very little. I was given the standard Church Information Form, which contains all the numbers and statistics that we use to describe a church: membership, age demographics, income and expenses, mission budgets. I was also given a document, "A Plan for the 80s," which had been initiated by my predecessor, Elam Davies, and created by a long-range planning process. The search committee was eager for candidates for the job to pay as much attention to what Fourth Presbyterian Church wanted to become as to what it currently was. The plan was essentially "marching orders" for the new pastor. It said Fourth Church, strong as it was, should not rest on its laurels but grow in faith and strength and mission. It was out of that vision, and the decisions it inspired, that new programs and staff were put in place that helped the church grow in membership, stewardship, mission, and education.

A decade later we stepped back again for a time of reflection, dreaming, and planning and launched a program to restore the sanctuary, build a new Chestnut Street entrance and gallery, add a loggia for accessibility, join Westminster House to the main building, create a day care center where the Fellowship Hall used to be, and move Blair Chapel to an underused lounge area, freeing up desperately needed space for a new fellowship and program area we named Anderson Hall.

Ten years ago we did it again. We gathered a large and representative group of church members, and Barbara Wheeler, President of Auburn Seminary, led us in a retreat and helped us see ourselves as the church we had become: a bigger, more active, more mission-oriented congregation and a much younger congregation, with many more families and children than at any time in our history. Out of that retreat came Project Light.

Now it is time to refresh that vision in light of more changes and growth. I am grateful to everyone who participated in this process, particularly Juli Crabtree and Andy McGaan for their strong and faithful leadership, and to Don Allerton, who provided steady and wise staff resourcing along the way, and to Dana Ferguson, whose inspiration this project was and who provided early energy and liaison with our consultants, LatzBruni. The report shows a unique urban mainline Protestant congregation with superb lay leadership, a clear understanding of mission, a high level of commitment to expanding and deepening that mission in the days ahead, and a corresponding high level of frustration over the constraints placed on the life of this church and its mission by spatial limitations. The simple fact, confirmed by many of the report's recommendations, is that we are not able to provide for our current congregation, not to mention any hope of growing programs and mission.

To achieve this vision, we need space. We need it now.

I am encouraged by the emphasis on Christian education, youth and family ministries, and the bold vision that Fourth Presbyterian Church in the future will be known for its children and youth programs. The most amazing fact about Fourth Presbyterian Church is the annual number of infant baptisms, 134 last year. The second most amazing fact is that families are remaining in the city or are willing to drive miles on Sunday morning to be part of Fourth Presbyterian Church. Current studies of long-term effects on the current economic downturn consistently predict that big cities will benefit. That means the need for our youth and family programs will continue into the future.

I am convinced that Fourth Presbyterian Church's commitment to mission in our neighborhood and city is and has been the source of lively energy. My vision is that we will continue that commitment, in current outreach programs and new ways to reflect God's unconditional love for all humankind.

My hope is that Fourth Presbyterian Church will continue to reflect the best of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition in Reformed worship that is carefully and lovingly practiced, a lively presence of great music and great art, by classes, lectures, and seminars that reflect the Presbyterian tradition of loving God with both heart and mind, and by continuing to provide leadership to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbytery of Chicago.

And two things more: One, it is key that we make a concerted effort to increase the participation of laity in all aspects of the life of this church. What should distinguish us in the future is that we are both a big and growing urban church but also a congregation that is accessible to all and provides abundant opportunities for community, friendships, and personal involvement to develop.

Finally, the financial stability and strength of Fourth Presbyterian Church is paramount. It will involve two ongoing efforts: strengthening the church's endowment to provide a firm foundation for the future through planned giving, and increasing both the numbers of members and friends who support the church and the amounts given.

This is a great moment in the life of Fourth Presbyterian Church, and I am deeply grateful to be part of it.

Faithfully,
John M. Buchanan

Inception of the Long-range plan

In early 2008, John Buchanan and Dana Ferguson, Executive Associate Pastor, began the process leading up to this report. The last time Fourth Presbyterian Church prepared a strategic, long-range plan was ten years ago, a veritable lifetime in the world of strategic plans. In addition, nearly half of the current congregation has joined the church since that time and did not participate in the earlier planning process. These factors, combined with the need to make a decision and move forward with a building project, demonstrated the necessity for new strategic thinking and a new long-range plan for Fourth Church. John and Dana concluded that Fourth Church should refresh its vision.

John Buchanan addressed a meeting of all Fourth Church officers in July 2008 to present the idea of “Refreshing the Vision” and to seek a consensus from church leadership on the “plan to plan.” Leo Latz of LatzBruni Partners, LLC, a consulting firm with which the church had worked to craft a development plan in 2007, then met with Dana Ferguson in August to design the new visioning and planning process.

Formation of the Steering Committee

In August, 2008, Dana Ferguson asked Andy McGaan and Juli Crabtree to co-chair a Steering Committee to guide the long-range planning process. Sadly, at the very outset of Refreshing the Vision, Dana fell ill and could participate in an early planning meeting only by telephone from home. In the wake of that illness, Don Allerton, Interim Development Director of Fourth Presbyterian Church, graciously agreed to step in. He provided invaluable leadership and assistance.

Goals of the Steering Committee

At their first meeting, the Steering Committee members set three goals for this process: that it be meaningful to the future of Fourth Church, that it be open and transparent to the entire church community, and that it involve the entire congregation.

In order to produce a meaningful document that could serve to guide staff and member actions over the next decade, the Steering Committee closely reviewed the process outlined by LatzBruni and made changes, specifically the conducting of a congregational survey early in the process and the formation of the Communications and Technology task teams to reflect widely felt needs expressed in the visioning and task team meetings.

To ensure openness and transparency, the Steering Committee surveyed the congregation at the outset to solicit broad member input and to make certain that the entire Fourth Church community was informed about the process.

Finally, the Steering Committee attempted to include a cross-section of the congregation through participation in the task teams and by conducting two all-inclusive congregational surveys.

Refreshing the Vision Process

The process for Refreshing the Vision was designed by Leo Latz and Dana Ferguson. It began with a series of “visioning sessions,” during which groups of Fourth Church officers and staff were asked to describe in broad terms what they believed the church could achieve and become over the next ten years. Those visions were reported to nine task teams organized around substantive responsibilities of the Session’s standing committees (*e.g.*, Children and Families; Evangelism; Worship, Music, and the Arts). The task teams, co- chaired by the clergy person assigned to the related Session committee and a church member with experience in the pertinent area, met twice prior to the end of the year to consider not only the visioning output but also to discuss in depth the goals and priorities for their respective missions. The task team reports were submitted to two over-arching task teams: Communications and Facilities. These task team reports are available at www.fourthchurch.org/taskteams.pdf and are a rich source of the congregations’ desires and priorities for its programs.

All of these meetings were held over a three- to four-month period and involved more than 150 members and staff of the Fourth Church community and spanned nearly every aspect of our church’s mission and program needs. As process facilitators, Leo Latz and Kevin Larson of LatzBruni Partners were the common denominators through the entire process. Leo and/or Kevin were present at every one of the meetings.

As part of the process, the Steering Committee oversaw two surveys of Fourth Church’s entire congregation, one in the fall and a second in March. The first survey asked simply what goals members have for the church and what steps the church should take to achieve them. Its purpose was twofold: to receive input from as many members of the Fourth Church community as possible and to ensure that members were aware of the ongoing Refreshing the Vision process. A more comprehensive survey, designed by church member Ali Burke, was conducted in March to get more specific responses from all congregants regarding the priorities and recommendations that had emerged from the visioning and task team meetings.

Results

There was an extraordinary convergence of opinion and consensus of views among the participants in this process regarding Fourth Church’s vision themes, prioritized programmatic goals, and capital needs. The following summary findings are based on these themes and provide the foundation for the recommended next steps to respond to and implement the strategies and priorities resulting from Refreshing the Vision.

Expanding Programs

Many of the results call for expanded programs that demand the creation of additional space to overcome current facility constraints.

- The social outreach dimension of Fourth Church's mission was strongly reaffirmed as a distinct attribute of the church and an attraction for new members. However the impact and reach of current Fourth Church ministries and programs are severely limited by the lack of sufficient and appropriately designed space.
- An enhanced emphasis on the integration of youth, children, and families into the traditional and new worship services of Fourth Church was a recurring recommendation by the majority of task teams. Therefore, it will be important for Fourth Church to address the facilities needs serving youth, children, and families, given the increasing number of new member families joining the church and recognizing that these families will represent much of its vitality in the years ahead.
- Continued close coordination and collaboration between Chicago Lights, a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and the church's mission activities will ensure that both prosper and grow.

Increasing Member Involvement

Many comments call for fostering engaging relationships in all aspects of church life and strengthening connections across natural groups.

- There is a common desire to help this large church feel smaller to its membership. Encouraging and assisting members to engage with one another and with pastoral staff were viewed as the most effective ways to achieve this element of the vision.
- Increasing member participation in ministry work and in financial support for the church is imperative. We must (1) increase the relatively low level at which Fourth Church members participate in ministry work and (2) raise the insufficient percentage of members who pledge in the annual appeal.
- Many task team members voiced a strong desire to gather and track more detailed background information on members regarding their talents and areas of interest so that the church could be more proactive in reaching out to and engaging members in both ministry work and fellowship.
- The physical and organizational structure of Fourth Church presents challenges to communication and collaboration among myriad church programs. We observed many natural opportunities for synergy and enhanced teamwork (i.e., Youth and Chicago Lights Tutoring) that are not happening at this time.

Creating New Space

The expanded programs and increased member involvement mentioned above will require additional space. In addition to the space already noted, the following were specifically mentioned.

- The need for more space equipped with appropriate, state-of-the-art technology was strongly reaffirmed throughout this entire process.
- A more accessible presence on Michigan Avenue to reflect the priority Fourth Church members place on welcoming others and to assist in evangelism efforts.
- A call to design the new space as a “green building” in order to responsibly steward our environmental resources.

Much work is to be done if Fourth Church is to meet its goals to be a fully inclusive worship community and truly to reflect the diversity of the Chicago communities it serves.

Implementation of the Plan

In looking toward the future of Fourth Church programs, the Refreshing the Vision process has put a spotlight on the need for more space. Although this process and the decision to dissolve the Project Light Leadership Team were not formally connected, the timing is fortuitous. The new building initiative has put in place the structure to carry the vision forward.

Three committees have been formed in connection with the new building process: a Building Committee, a Finance Committee, and a Communications Committee. The work of these three will be overseen by a Steering Committee, of which Andy McGaan and Juli Crabtree, co –chairs of Refreshing the Vision, are members. In addition, Doug Grissom, Maggie Lewis and Marty Sherrod, both member of the Refreshing the Vision Steering Committee, will serve on the new Steering Committee. This continuity from the Refreshing the Vision process will allow, indeed will require, this committee to periodically revisit the plan to assess whether its programmatic goals are being realized.

Further, the Refreshing the Vision Steering Committee has asked the staff to begin addressing no- or low-cost programmatic recommendations that could be implemented immediately. Some of these are already happening: a task force is addressing issues that arose in connection with the Fourth Shepherds program, and staff members are working on ways to incorporate lay leadership and increased roles for youth and children in worship.

Finally, additional task forces or committees may be required to address specific programmatic or operational issues.

Conclusion

It is important to understand what Refreshing the Vision is and what it is not. The long-range plan that is the result of this endeavor is designed to guide the decisions of Fourth Church leaders over the next decade and beyond. The life of the church is lived each day in worship, in pastoral care, in counseling, in fellowship, and in volunteer and mission activities. In all its vitality, the life of this church will grow and thrive.

By capturing the visions and dreams of Fourth Church members and staff, this plan establishes goals the church will strive to achieve. The plan, by nature and design, is not a blueprint for the future, as many of the programmatic and operational dreams it contains may not be achievable due to budgetary and other constraints. It is the belief of the Steering Committee, however, that an ambitious plan is one that will best serve the needs of Fourth Church for the coming decade.

Acknowledgements

The Steering Committee wishes to thank all of the staff and member participants in the visioning and task team steps of this process. The results of those meetings are the heart of this report. The names of those who participated can be found below.

In addition, there are some people without whose contributions this process would not have been possible. Don Allerton was critical to the timely completion of this process. He stepped in when Dana Ferguson took medical leave in September 2008 and has kept close watch on the process ever since. Kathryn Johnson has provided invaluable administrative assistance to this process from the beginning. And Ali Burke took charge of the online survey, designing it and getting it online. Finally, many thanks to Ann Rehfeldt, who oversaw all of the communications efforts connected with this process, from placing announcements in the News and Opportunities folder for Sunday mornings to putting the online survey link on the website and everything in between.

Participants in the Visioning Sessions

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