

Reimagining Spring Glen Statement: DRAFT

*The following document is the result of conversations and learnings by the Reimagining Church Team including **Barbara Libby, Ray Andrewsen, Jesse Kalivrousis, Evan Heath, and Pastor Jack Davidson** beginning in September 2021. This team was recruited to ignite the congregation's imagination so that we might joyfully contemplate the possibilities for what Spring Glen Church could become. To this end, we are not a team with by-law authority, but conversation starters charged with engaging the various committees, groups, and demographics of our community to discern how we might incorporate an imaginative mindset into our ongoing work and ministry. The following three statements centered around Membership, Fellowship, and DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) are meant to invite the church to other horizons, to consider new possibilities and dreams of what Spring Glen can be without throwing away what Spring Glen is. We offer these statements amidst the radical change each of us has had to reckon with over the past several years. We offer these statements as potential guiding posts for Spring Glen Church and the Church Universal that we have discussed as ripe for reimagining, rethinking, and retooling as we approach our 100th Anniversary in 2030.*

We imagine a church that is able to adapt amidst the hardships and challenges of the world...that invites its members into a deep and transformative commitment to Jesus' commands to love God and love thy neighbor...that encourages new ways of engaging with one another in fellowship...that embodies the statements and creeds we confess verbally in actions of service and justice.

Membership

We imagine a church that supports membership without labels; a church that recognizes and adapts to the needs of its members in both a religious and non-religious manner, creates a sanctuary for emotional, social, educational and spiritual fulfillment.

Context... While Spring Glen Church remains a vital and thriving congregation, our membership has not been immune to the broader cultural trends. Over the past 30 years, the trends show a decline in membership and number of pledging units, but a recent rise in worship attendance and overall pledged amount. It would seem we are seeing a drop in casual membership, but a deepening in committed core membership. There are multi-decade members who have a very distant connection to the life of the congregation while an increasing number of active participants are not formal members. In contrast to the loose nature of our membership culture, our mission statement lays out clear commitments to pledge our prayers, our gifts, and our services to support engagement in worship, fellowship, education, and advancing the cause of Christ.

We Wonder... In response to these trends, we wonder what it would look like to replace the term “member” with the term “minister.” In this framework, instead of joining church like you might join a club, you instead are invited & trained to become a co-laborer in the ministries of the church with concrete commitments based on our mission statement. You are not just attending, but helping to lead the church.

Multiple Belonging

Context... It is increasingly common for our members to have interfaith families, families with emotional ties to other faith communities that feed their spiritual needs.

We wonder... What it looks like to accept multiple belonging as the new normal rather than the exception. And how we might embrace that new normal to advance the Spring Glen community.

Mutual Education

Context... name the things that are continuing (book group), the things that we have developed (aging program)

We wonder what it looks like...

Youth Ministry

Context... Providing young members with a space to be with others around their same age while also providing opportunities to interact with those of other ages. It is a space that allows the younger members to discuss topics, both religious and non-religious, that are important to them

without the influence of older generations. Young members benefit from a space with both serious conversation and space to just unwind from the pressures of the rest of their lives.

We wonder... What it looks like to have a youth experience that both recognizes them as valuable members of the church but also understands the need to provide a space for them to focus on themselves and their wellbeing.

We imagine a church where youth have an opportunity to be educated about different kinds of faith and belief and find a kind that works for them. One that encourages all routes of faith and welcomes all levels of Jesus-opacity. Not just conforming to what parents think — this time period is such an important one for growth and identity, church shouldn't be something that is restrictive or pre-determined.

We imagine a church where youth have time with similar age groups and have chances to see other forms of faith in people that look like them. Where “extracurriculars” are kid-friendly & plentiful and provide a place for fostering identity (for me, this was church theater, for others, it might be music performance, community service, etc).

We imagine a church where service/mission trips/trips in general are offered and give youth a chance to flourish and grow away from possibly familiar restrictive authoritative figures and learn new things about themselves. These trips provide chances for giving back and gaining new perspectives. It is also very important that youth are educated and interested in different forms of justice. Racism, sexism, are not gone from the world by any means and to make steps toward that future the future of our population must be educated and passionate. OASIS has done some justice themed nights involving education, which is really important — some kids might also be lacking this in school.

Open and affirming: at this point, *open* is not the star of the show. All aspects of the church and youth programming especially must emphasize the *affirming* portion. The church must show youth that the parts of them that might make them feel like the “other” such as race or sexuality are valuable parts of the fabric of their identity. A church that promotes these values is one that sets itself up for future diversity and a more secure, identity-embracing next generation, both inside and outside the context of faith.

Fellowship

Spring Glen Church is a body seeking fellowship in community. We are a broad community of friends and strangers (young and old, single and married, gay and straight, trans and bi, students of all ages, employed and retired, extroverts and introverts, and everything in between)... We are a gathering of folks who can and do ask the hard questions about our faith, the Bible, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and what all those mean for living in the 21st century. We are not only a community that prays, worships, & studies together, we also enact our faith out in the world. We are “open hearted wanderers” who share our wholehearted and vulnerable places as we struggle to be a follower of Jesus.

Committee Structure

We imagine a church where “Committee” isn’t an obligation to dread, but a team to engage our passions, to develop our skills, to grow our faith, to build community, and to enact meaningful ministry responsive to the way God calls us to meet the ever-changing needs of the world.

Context Our church’s by-lawed committees were created for a much larger church in and for a different time. Instead of 500-600 members Spring Glen is now roughly 300 members. Leadership involvement and committees can drain the energies of members and lead to burnout. We have been experimenting with a consolidated model for Committees and have not assumed that every Committee had to meet monthly. The recent model has invited Committees to “Meet Less, Minister more”.

Temporary Committee Consolidation includes: Good Works (Community Action & Benevolence), Christian Education (CE, Music, Theater Arts), Deacons (Deacons, Fellowship & Music), Trustees & Stewardship, House, Delegates, Nominating. Council: Moderator, Clerk, Vice Moderator, Senior pastor, Assoc. Pastor, CCM/DCE, Committee Chairs, & ex officio members

We wonder how we might evaluate this Temporary Committee Consolidation model and share an update with the congregation about how this might work as we move into the future.

We wonder whether we might engage in conversation with other churches who are experimenting with different Committee structures that might inform our process as we consider options for the future.

We wonder whether there are additional tweaks to be made as we move ahead.

Technology & Location

We imagine a church that offers a highly effective, accessible, and creative (largely glitch-free) ministry program – both online/virtual as well as in person as the pandemic

recedes. We imagine a church that is not confined by geography, where “Spring Glen” is not our limit but serves as our base camp from which seekers can become partners with Jesus Christ from across geographical distance to participate in the life of the church.

Context When Spring Glen Church was founded, it began in a specific building in the Spring Glen section of Hamden, CT. Over the past 90 years, this community has expanded its actual physical and virtual spaces as well as inviting folks from a much broader geography of participants. Spring Glen has for many years addressed the needs of folks unable to be “in person” at the church – a phone party line in the sanctuary still exists and a cd burner recording system created cd’s of worship.

The pandemic has increased our understanding of the ways church community can function and stay connected with people beyond a building or a town. In our virtual incarnation for worship, some Sundays have included worshippers from 5 countries on three continents. Worship leaders have been simultaneously leading from 5 different states. Special worship services like *Godspell* Sunday and the virtual Xmas Pageant are examples of successful and creative virtual services.

The pandemic has also increased our understanding of the ways church community grows and changes. In our virtual incarnation beyond worship time - office and classroom spaces have developed as remote spaces allowing both community and staff to function untethered from most physical constraints allowing us to become an ever more welcome and affirming church, not hampered by distance, weather, temperature, or health concerns. Several of the affinity groups (Contemplative prayer, Aging Group, Book group, Bible Study & Youth Groups) easily moved onto virtual platforms and have continued to meet regularly.

We wonder what it looks like to expand and enhance our technology capabilities for worship – with creative visuals on screens in both in-person worship and online, dynamic music of all kinds, and creative presentation of Biblical texts and inclusion of a wide spectrum of voices...

We wonder what it looks like to increase the understanding for community building - not only before or after worship but throughout each week for fuller participation by children, youth, and adults of all ages.

We wonder what it looks like to enhance and expand our activity in the wider communities across space and time, continuing our faithful commitment to social action in the world.

Facility Usage

We imagine a church whose facilities and spaces are an active ministry to the entire community.

Context

Spring Glen Church has been a vibrant community-center offering space for both church and community needs through the years.

Church needs have traditionally included: regular Sunday Worship, special worship services, Board & Committee meetings, children & adult education, affinity groups, family programs, and the music ministry

Community needs have traditionally included: a pre-school nursery program, AA & NA meetings, Boy and Girl scouts, Community groups (singing, civic, fundraisers for non-profits), blood drives, and Korean school.

We wonder how we might imagine the return to building usage (post pandemic) and how we might shift or change building usage for the future. Might we build showers in the lower level for visiting mission groups or other housing needs be a possibility. Might we reimagine the sanctuary space by putting pews on rollers so that we might use seating that is more flexible for the future.

We wonder how we might expand the use of both the inside and outside of building and grounds. Are there alternate ways for us to use our non-paved areas - Is it time for more gardens (vegetable & native plants) and less lawn? Is it time for art exhibits both inside and outside the building? With a largely vacant parking lot except on Sundays, how might that space be utilized in new ways (as it was to distribute pandemic related resources for the town)?

We wonder if the time is right for us to utilize our facility to offer housing for refugees or the homeless adults or (LGBTQIA+) youth.

We wonder if the time is right for additional usage (by others?) of the energy generated by our solar panels.

Staffing

We imagine a church where there is plentiful and gifted staff who help enhance our shared ministry and who empower all to enact meaningful ministry.

Context

Spring Glen has utilized many and varied staff through the years – although most typically a fulltime Senior pastor, a part time Associate pastor (since 2011), a part time Administrative Assistant, a part time choir director/organist, a sexton, yard and snow removal service, part time staffing for both Children's and Youth Ministry, and a seminary intern.

During the pandemic we have tried out a different model with a FT Senior pastor, a 10-15 hours a week Chaplain, a 12-15 hour choir director/organist, a 10 hour Care Coordinator, a 12-15 hour

a week seminary student, a 5 hour a week Administrative Assistant, a 12-15 hour a week Youth Ministry leader, a 10 hour a week Middle School intern, a part time Children's Ministry person, and two live stream worship techs on Sundays.

One aspect of Staff engagement has to do with COMMUNICATION. Through the years, staff have: gathered info, updated, & produced a monthly (paper & electronic) newsletter as well as weekly (paper) bulletins with order of worship, summary of events & news of interest that are distributed at in person Sunday services. The church has an older website that needs enhancing. During the pandemic we moved to a once a week shortened email with a link to the worship service, and notice of a few of the activities of the church.

We wonder whether a significant expansion of our communications is in order to include an updated strategic plan for both internal and external communications to include:

- An updated and robust website (particularly geared for seekers/new folks)
- An expanded and visually exciting weekly and/or monthly online newsletter
- A weekly worship email with order of worship and links for online worship

We wonder whether once we have screens in the sanctuary whether there is ongoing need to produce & distribute paper worship bulletins for in-person Sunday worship services. Might it be the right time to consider using the screens to offer all that is needed both for in person & online worship participants?

We wonder if further additions/changes to staff might include:

- a Communications/Technology person beyond Sunday morning
- a person to address specific needs of a congregation "online" and "virtual"
- a person who decides/responds to the use of the facility as needs expand

We wonder what kind of staffing model will be most helpful as we move ahead and who can help us evaluate our current staffing model and how best to use the gifts and talents of those already on staff.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Spring Glen Church was organized in 1930, grew, and thrived in an era of racial, religious, and gender segregation. The Spring Glen neighborhood prospered in this time of omnipresent disinheritance while adjacent neighborhoods faced challenges. Recognizing this historical inequity and the resulting inconsistency with the messaging of Jesus to love thy neighbor, Spring Glen Church commits to the strongest efforts to incorporate, emancipate, and welcome all to its doors in the spirit of God's widest love. Our church seeks to reflect the diversity of its community through welcoming worship, programming, and spirit-filled community action. We value all of God's children and seek to create a loving home for all coming to our doors to be in fellowship with our spirit community.

Open & Affirming 25

We imagine a church that fully embodies our intersectional Open & Affirming commitments adopted 25 years ago.

Context: Spring Glen Church came early to create an Open and Affirming presence in 1997. The church congregation determined early that an open and affirming declaration would be the first step towards healing longstanding wounds of isolation. In the first quiet steps forward to affirm those carrying the wounds of intimidation, harassment, neglect, violence, estrangement, and the psychic damage caused by the widest forms of bigotry, Spring Glen Church opened its doors to all.

However, we recognize opening doors to all is only the first step in a journey of countless miles. To open and stop before the ampersand (&) is to neglect our Christian principles. The journey towards affirmation is the pouring forth of our deepest Agape love for all of our friends and neighbors. We affirm we are all God's children and relish the dynamic complexity that reigns supreme in our mortal family. As we affirm we find joy and broadcast spread the seeds that allow us to reap a harvest of love, equality, and neighborly care. Our open and affirming imagery offers hope like the beacon of a lighthouse in stormy seas.

We wonder... As we learn more about the body and its sexual expressiveness, can we continue to nurture and welcome an even more representative church body composed of all of the sexually fluid spectrum and learn more from it? Are we the arbiters of "right" and "wrong" in such expressions and what will be our level of toleration as we confront the changing notions of what constitutes "family" and domicile formulation. Is there a statement we need to make?

What can we do to expand the notion of “open and affirming” to include so much of the human fabric that is ever so complex? Can we develop programming that welcomes and nurtures a community diverse in age? Would that incorporate more resources for aging elders and families in need of caregiving support?

Are we prepared to incorporate a membership that offers sustenance and peace for anyone suffering from the ravages of mental illness? Considering studies indicate most everyone will encounter some form of mental illness in a lifetime can we offer support for these special life passages or conditions of permanence?

A significant percentage of the population has experienced some form of physical deficiency or impairment. Can we affirm neighbors who are sensory deprived or experiencing severe challenges from medical conditions? Are we totally ADA compliant? Are all areas of the church accessible and safe for handicapped accessibility and does the church have capacity to ensure these changes? Are there technological changes we can make in the sanctuary to provide better sightlines and exceptional acoustics?

Or failing in these initiatives due to financial and operational constraints, can we be a core source of education on these matters for our neighbors?

Desegregation & Racial Justice

We imagine a church that uproots the sin of racism both internally and externally.

Context: Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement projects corrective intentional action to right the wrongs of generations. Our context is not just within the Spring Glen neighborhood, the scene of the original founding of the church in 1930, but beyond our municipal, state, country, cultural, and psychic borders to see the world in its deprivation of the spirit. The sin of hatred and oppression knows no boundaries.

The inequities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and informed trauma has been reinforced in the absence of determined action. Spring Glen Church has long had a strong presence in our region as a supporter of organizations which attack societal ills and structural disparities but we are called to greater action that bears fruit. We shall not rest in our efforts until we see injustice remedied and a community that is in pure healing and reconciliation.

Spring Glen Church has been blessed with ordained and lay “prophets” who challenged orthodoxy and sought justice for our neighbors. However, we recognize the soft comfort of our relatively affluent neighborhood and church body has led to more comfort than action at times. This statement may be a source of discomfort to many within the Spring Glen Church family.

Our understanding of history to address systemic inequities in justice, opportunity, and full citizenship brings forth a renewed vigor to deepen our faith community in the mission.

We Wonder... While Sunday mornings remain one of the most segregated hours during the American week, we wonder if there is a possibility to grow Spring Glen Church into a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community that finds its ties in the community of Christ rather than within the invisible fencing of cultural containment. In sharing background, experiences, and perspectives can we find a more pure common ground and become better neighbors?

Spring Glen has a strong history of supporting racial justice and standing up with a pure voice against oppression. How can we move this sentiment out more into the community and out of the sanctuary?

Trauma Informed

We imagine a church that is well equipped to care for the diverse communal & individual griefs we are all holding.

Context: Our church emerges in a period of reimagining after a tectonic shift in traditional church practices. In-sanctuary worship often became virtual online worship during COVID. Places and spaces to convene for regular church activities were dispatched to outdoor or online spaces. Community was challenged. Isolation grew. We felt loss and death.

Despite these challenges, we understand that marginalization and trauma has been an ongoing reality for many within our congregation and in communities beyond our doors. We elect to feel this ongoing pain and create worship and reflective spaces for healing, friendship, and community.

Over time we have heard the prayers of those suffering in the valleys of mental health challenges and the prayers of our faith community members walking alongside this acute dark demon. We know that physical pain, ailment, and the dark road of dementia has informed the lives of our neighbors. We also acknowledge the rising tide of addictions in this liminal time of discernment and uncertainty.

Our congregation seeks to provide programming, healing, service, and resources to provide balm.

We Wonder... Can the church body work alongside local professional and civic organizations to help and provide more resources for anyone suffering from lingering trauma? Can we learn more from the local police, health officials, first responders, psychologists, school officials and

teachers, and others outside of our church membership who can help educate us on trauma. Can we invite these professionals into our membership or as resources?

Fear pervades our current culture. Younger generations hold a generally pessimistic outlook on their life expectancy and our opportunity to attack societal ills, global warming, and complicated systemic problems. In this, youth have suffered from some form of trauma. How do we heal?