



STRATEGIC PLAN, 2023-2029

MISSION

We are responsibly united in this Church for the public worship of God, for fellowship and mutual instruction in Christian faith and life, and for concerted effort to advance the cause of Christ. To these purposes we pledge, so far as we are able, our prayers, our gifts and our services.

CURRENT STATE: SPRING GLEN CHURCH TODAY

Spring Glen Church is abundantly blessed with strengths and passions that differentiate it and that can be nourished and leveraged as it leans into its next chapter. Indeed, there are many things about Spring Glen Church that staff, lay leaders, and parishioners all hope will not change in the period ahead, but rather will continue to be definitive DNA markers of a church that enjoys a clear and distinctive identity within our denominational culture. Among these markers are Spring Glen Church's identity and reputation as a church that is:

- a leader in progressive Christianity, combining deep spiritual nurture, intellectual depth, and deep commitment to the causes of social justice—in particular racial justice, LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability;
- authentically welcoming, open, and affirming;
- a place for worship that speaks meaningfully, authentically, and relevantly through diverse voices using kinetically engaging artistic expressions; and
- ambitious, creative, intergenerational, and boldly engaging in outside-the-box experiments in ministry.

Spring Glen Church today considers itself a community of friends and strangers 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 a loving Christian community that prayerfully engages contemporary issues within the context of scripture and history. We strive to be Christ-centered without being dogmatic; we invite questioning, uncertainty, and open explorations of faith. Open-hearted wanderers, we endeavor to share our wholehearted and vulnerable places as we struggle to be followers of Jesus. At Spring Glen Church today, one finds an intentionality to worship and unabashed, unapologetic enthusiasm for worship.

Spring Glen Church is not only a community that prays, worships, and studies together, but also a community committed to acting its faith out in the world. Spring Glen Church today is considered a vibrant community center offering space for both church and community needs throughout the year, and it has a strong regional presence as a supporter of organizations that attack societal ills and

structural disparities. Spring Glen Church is an open and affirming church committed to affirming those carrying the wounds of intimidation, harassment, neglect, violence, estrangement, and the psychic damage caused by the widest forms of bigotry. We are a church that understands charity (benevolences) is only a first step towards greater equity, inclusion and social justice.

When members of the congregation were asked as part of the strategic planning process to identify reasons why they would recommend Spring Glen Church to a friend seeking a new church home, responses converged around two great strengths of this church: it is a “genuinely” and “authentically” welcoming and inclusive community, and messages from the pulpit are meaningful, thought-provoking, faith-focused, and inspiring. When parishioners were asked what they appreciate most about Spring Glen Church, the top responses were: worship services that promote spiritual growth, social justice commitment and faith in action work, and Spring Glen Church’s status as an open and affirming congregation.

When staff and lay leaders were asked what makes them most proud to be associated with Spring Glen Church, responses converged around the same strengths: open and affirming community, commitment to Christian action and focus on social justice, and a welcoming, caring community of faith. Also lifted up as sources of pride and distinction were the creativity, open-mindedness, and sheer joy one experiences as part of the Spring Glen Church family.

Although Spring Glen Church is confident and secure in its strengths and distinctions, we look to and plan for the future at a time marked by uncertainties, inequities, anxieties, and troubling trends for churches such as ours. This is an era of pain and isolation and of polarizing national conversation. People experiencing much anxiety and fear. People are busy, exhausted, burned out. People seem eager to gather and rally around causes, but disinclined to join; “membership” (in any organization, not church faith-based ones) does not carry the weight or evoke the degree of commitment it once did. Meanwhile big non-denominational mega-churches are offering sort of a club model, placing not much emphasis on commitment or theology, yet promising (and delivering) a great sense of connectivity and community.

To be sure, Spring Glen Church is confronting significant challenges and some vexing questions as we chart a future path through uncertain, unpredictable, even unprecedented times.

As the country emerges from the COVID crisis but still faces serious COVID-related health risks, we are finding and applying new ways to function as a church community and stay connected with people beyond a building or a town—through a virtual incarnation for worship and a virtual incarnation beyond worship time; but, even though we are now good at making those connections, we worry about having created two separate SGC communities—one in-person, one remote—that do not ever connect with each other as “the” Spring Glen Church community of faith. When asked to identify five areas that require strengthening as Spring Glen Church positions itself for the future, the most-cited response was “opportunities for fellowship and building community within the congregation.”

With the ongoing de-centering of church in the wider culture and then two years of church being a virtual experience, we realize our members need to re-learn how to be proactive members and leaders of a faith community. What does/will community look like for Spring Glen Church in these times? Are we valuing all the members we currently have (in all their diversity)? Do we reflect/represent the community beyond church? Is there a disconnect between who comes to SGC (i.e., who we are) and who we’d like to be? How will we live our values as an O&A church? What will SGC champion—as enduring components of our faith community?

While we have seen a rise in worship attendance and overall amount pledged, we are seeing a decline in membership and in number of pledging units. While we are experiencing a decline in casual membership, the number of active participants who are not formal members is increasing. What will be our concept of membership going forward? Recognizing that many come to church solely in search or spiritual nourishment, how will we affirm and serve them while also seeking to reorient our culture and people's concept of church from *church as a place where I am served* to *church as a place where I am served and I serve*?

When asked as part of the strategic planning process what are the most important foci for faith-formation programming as Spring Glen Church, congregants' top-three responses were: social justice issues (68% rated this "very important"), community outreach (59%), and care for the environment/God's creation (55%); ranked by percentage of respondents choosing "very important" or "somewhat important," care for the environment/God's creation topped the list (at 93%!). We are recognizing that our relatively affluent neighborhood and church body have led to more comfort than action at times, and thus we are feeling a call to greater action that bears fruit.

When congregants were asked which five external social issues (from a long list of possibilities provided in the survey) weigh most heavily on their mind and/or heart these days, the top choices were: racism, xenophobia, and White nationalism (79%); gun violence¹ (74%); climate change/climate justice (62%); mental health crisis, especially among young people (52%); and anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination and hostility (39%). Is Spring Glen Church doing enough in any of these areas? Where should staff and church goers direct their energy and focus? Which of these social issues should be priority(ies)?

The question of focus and priorities is an absolutely critical one as Spring Glen Church looks to the future. Staff, lay leaders, and members of the congregation *all* are both keenly aware and deeply concerned that the current staff, and the current senior pastor specifically, cannot and should not sustain the current workload. One staff member described the situation this way to the Strategic Planning Task Force:

"SGC is limited in our effectiveness through the current staffing structure. We cannot grow or do the outreach we hope to do with one full-time person. There are so many immediate needs that surface in the life of a church, which makes planning ahead and collective visioning challenging (and oftentimes put on the backburner in order to respond to what is happening in the present moment). If we are to take care of our current members while also reaching out, partnering with the larger community and engaging in justice-oriented work, Jack needs another one or two other full-time staff members to support this work."

What kind of a staffing model will be most helpful as we move ahead? Can we afford to bring on additional staff?

At the same time, lay leaders are stretched thin and burning out. The same folks keep stepping up (or getting tapped) to volunteer. Spring Glen Church is governed by a committee structure created for a much larger church in and for a different time. What committee structure makes the most sense? How can we build and sustain a robust pipeline of volunteers eager to engage, serve, and lead?

¹ Note: The survey was conducted very soon after one of a series of recent mass shootings in America.

ENVISIONED FUTURE: SPRING GLEN CHURCH IN 2029

To address the questions and challenges we face today, and to realize God's plans and our own dreams for Spring Glen Church's future, we must be willing to embrace change. As Senior Trustee Scott Lucker wrote in his May 2022 annual report to the congregation on behalf of the board of trustees, "God gave Noah a rainbow, Sarah a child, Mary an empty tomb, and Paul a blinding light. Our faith teaches us that there are continually times of renewal and new beginnings, and that God's mighty spirit makes a world of difference." This is such a time: a time of renewal and new beginnings for Spring Glen Church.

With God lighting the way for us, we envision a Spring Glen Church in 2029, its 100th anniversary, that is in some important ways becoming an even stronger version of what it is already today and in other ways creating something that does not exist here today.

We envision a Spring Glen Church that remains a center of joy and of radical love for its congregation and community. We envision a church that is still resolutely committed to the strongest efforts to incorporate, emancipate, and welcome all to its doors in the spirit of God's widest love. Spring Glen Church will more fully reflect the diversity of its local community not only through welcoming worship but also through programming and spirit-filled community action. With fidelity to its legacy of meaningful worship, spirit-filled music, and provocative sermons, Spring Glen Church will offer a highly effective, accessible, and creative ministry program, both online-virtual as well as in person, that reflects the changed and changing times of today; not confined by geography, Spring Glen Church will be a "base camp" from which seekers can become partners with Jesus Christ from across geographical distance.

Spring Glen Church in 2029 will be building and nurturing a strong sense of community among members of its congregation not only before or after worship on Sundays, but also throughout each week, providing expanded opportunities for fellowship and fuller participation by children, youth, and adults of all ages. There will be new possibilities for meaningful interaction among all—from newcomers to long-term members—and new opportunities to gather diverse people in ways relevant to them. This deeper and wider involvement in activities, events, and lay leadership will be leading to a shared sense that the joy, love and faith within Spring Glen Church's congregation are growing as well.

In these turbulent, divisive times, Spring Glen Church will be the calm in the storm. The gifted staff will be well equipped to care for the diverse communal and individual griefs of its congregation. Spring Glen Church will be creating and offering worship, reflective spaces, programming, services, and resources to promote healing, friendship, and community among those dealing with loss, trauma, physical or mental health challenges, isolation or marginalization. It will be a safe harbor where people can bring their brokenness, tell their stories, and be vulnerable with each other.

At the same time, Spring Glen Church will assert its faithful commitment to social action in the wider world and to spreading God's love to heal and repair a broken world through hands-on caring, outreach, and justice ministries. Our justice work will be grounded in a deeper understanding of the way of Christ, who joined with the suffering, loved the outcast, lifted the downtrodden, challenged the powerful, and centered the marginalized both in his life and in his teaching. Members of the congregation will be challenged to see their neighbors and neighborhoods with a fresh set of eyes, encouraged to work toward inclusion of all people, and equipped to love across boundaries and differences. Spring Glen Church will remain on the forefront of social justice issues.

As we look ahead to 2029, we envision a Spring Glen Church that is willing to experiment and fail and that is masterfully and distinctively balancing...

- clergy-led with lay-led
- scripturally Christ-centered with interfaith engagement
- deep discipleship with hearty skepticism
- thoughtful intentionality with Spirit-led flexibility
- inward focus to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of parishioners with outward focus to put faith in action in service of neighbors in need
- joy-filled, boisterous creativity with peaceful contemplation
- didactic with experiential
- comforting assurances with stirring challenges
- ancient truths with contemporary context
- individual with relational
- self-discovery with empathy
- age-specific development with intergenerational connections, and
- known ways with new ways of being church.

In more tangible terms, we envision and aspire to be a vibrant and vital 100-year-old church with:

- a deep appreciation for its history and traditions coupled with a growing willingness to disrupt traditional ways of thinking and acting in order to adapt to the new world and ways to which God is calling us
- a congregation that is reviving old ways of being in community with each other that were temporarily lost during the pandemic while also finding new ways to engage with one another in fellowship
- an unwavering commitment to being a sanctuary for spiritual, emotional, social, and educational fulfillment
- an increasingly diverse congregation in communion with each other, seeking to understand and empathize with others and spread God's love in our fast-changing community, state, country, world
- 200-250 average participation weekly in worship, and a diverse offering of regular opportunities for spiritual growth at times of the week other than Sunday mornings
- a cohesive vision for Christian education, faith formation and discipleship
- a thriving youth ministry that offers a variety of ways for youth to explore their faith and engage in the life of the church, and that serves as a model for churches across the country
- a full-to-the-brim children's ministry with an engaging curriculum incorporating cutting-edge pedagogy that makes kids excited to be at church because it is a place that they feel fully loved and that anchors their entire identity and trains them for how to be courageous faith leaders
- an arts/music/theater program integrated into all aspects of the church that draws people from across the wider community and regularly hires a diversity of resident artists/musicians/performers

- an exemplary commitment to environmental sustainability and proactive stewardship of God's green earth
- an approach to Christian action and benevolence that is cohesive and informed by explicit philosophy, vision, and strategy
- an even deeper commitment to inter-faith work—understanding and embracing other faith traditions, and equipping ourselves to understand before we make judgments
- a social justice ministry rooted in liberation theology so bold and outside-the-box that it garners attention as an inspiring model from far and wide
- a staffing structure adequate to meet the demands of today and designed for growth, with intentional prioritization of diversity, equity and inclusion
- expanded, enhanced technology and communications capabilities that are leveraged to support mission and ministries and to deepen engagement both within the congregation and with the community beyond church walls
- the discipline to manage priorities and the courage to let go of things that have happened or been done a certain way for a long time
- a restructured and more flexible model for volunteer leadership that inspires members' passions—reenergizing rather than draining them, and
- facilities and spaces that reflect our commitment to environmental sustainability and are an active ministry to the entire Greater Hamden community.

Despite many challenges and unknowns, we remain hopeful and inspired by the opportunities and possibilities lying before us—many of them reaffirming long-standing passions and priorities of Spring Glen Church, and others of them pointing us in new directions.

FROM DREAMS TO REALITY: OUR GOALS AND STRATEGIES²

We are on a clear mission to create something more than what is. On this journey to the future God is calling us to, we need not only divine inspiration, but also a roadmap.

Our dreams and imaginings about new directions and visions for Spring Glen Church will not be realized if we do not translate them into practical, achievable goals and strategies. And so we have charted a path to guide us, stretch us, and unite us as a community of faith, a force for good, and a voice for justice in the world.

After a time of prayerful discernment, we are ready now to turn toward action. With bold faith we shall trust the journey.

² The six overarching goals that follow—some of them focusing on who we are and what we do as a faith community, others of them addressing the structures and resources necessary for us to do what we do and become what we aspire to be—are not listed in priority order; all six goals are deemed essential to our success and sustainability in the period ahead. The multi-year, goal-supporting strategies also are not listed in priority order; setting priorities for implementation will be an annual process that takes into consideration conditions prevailing at that time, available human and financial resources, and recent progress toward the future we have envisioned and the goals we have set.

OUR FAITH

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2

GOAL: Foster a loving and liberating relationship with God and our Christian faith through spirit-filled worship, compassionate spiritual care, and transformative opportunities for theological exploration, education, and growth

STRATEGIES:

- a. Actively support new ways of "being church" and experiment with different modes of providing inspiring, inclusive, relevant worship
- b. Embed our commitment to diversity, inclusion, social justice, and inter-faith understanding in worship experiences and Christian education offerings for all age groups
- c. Nurture and expand Spring Glen Church's commitment to inter-generational worship and spiritual journeying
- d. Engage clergy and laity to offer varied ways to support members of our congregation with emotional and spiritual care in times of sadness, transition, and celebration
- e. Foster spiritual thinking about the environment and heighten congregational commitment through frequent and substantial inclusion of eco-justice and creation care in worship and educational programs
- f. Engage adult members in providing dynamic children's ministries and youth programs that help young people explore their faith, share their interests, understand God's world through relevant experience, and open their hearts for service to others
- g. Continue to spread joy and open windows to the Divine through dynamic and diverse music, theater, and art offerings

OUR FRIENDSHIP

"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day God added to their number those who were being liberated." Acts 2:46-47

GOAL: Build community and forge deeper bonds as a church family by sharing our stories, vulnerabilities, interests, work, and fun

STRATEGIES:

- a. Reimagine the concept of "belonging" to transcend the traditional concepts of "membership" and "attendance"
- b. Extend radical hospitality and Christian love toward the most vulnerable among us and those who may be feeling lost or alone
- c. Uplift our Open & Affirming commitments and welcome the ministry and participation of all persons of all identity categories such as age, gender identity, health, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, religious and ethnic background and economic circumstance

- d. Create new and regular opportunities for congregants to be known and to get to know each other and to connect with each other in ways that promote a deeper sense of meaning and interconnectedness in their lives
- e. Leverage technology to create meaningful connections and build community within the Spring Glen Church community as a whole and between those who engage with church life in person and those who engage remotely
- f. Provide spiritual and social experiences that provoke thought, discussion, and open and honest sharing with one another
- g. Develop and implement a strategy for engaging more members of the congregation in Christian sharing groups and affinity groups built around shared interests, joys, and passions

OUR SERVICE

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison, and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Matthew 25:35-40

GOAL: Mobilize our membership and neighbors for hands-on Christian service in our local community and beyond

STRATEGIES:

- a. Develop a clear guiding philosophy and strategy for Spring Glen Church's outreach ministries and benevolences, reflecting best practices and high-impact models for effecting positive change through service and philanthropy
- b. Pursue an experimental approach to encourage all congregants across identity categories to open their hearts and use their hands in service to and with others throughout the week
- c. Collaborate with local and global ecumenical and interfaith partners to engage together in service work that is inspired by shared values and deepens our mutual understanding
- d. Harness the energy of socially conscious individuals and coordinate with like-minded organizations in the wider community with a passion to serve
- e. Follow Christ's example by prioritizing the needs and concerns of the most vulnerable
- f. Infuse our outreach ministries with a care-for-the-earth perspective that taps into congregational passion around environmental stewardship and reflects concern for the local impact of environmental injustice

OUR WITNESS

"The Spirit of our God is upon me, because the Holy One has anointed me, sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners." Isaiah 61:1 (& Luke 4:18)

GOAL: Follow Christ's courageous example to oppose bigotry, advocate with the marginalized, and dismantle sinful structural inequities within the church and society

STRATEGIES:

- a. Increase congregational understanding of the theological foundation for justice work
- b. Encourage self-reflection and raise our collective consciousness around the impact of exclusion, oppression, and systemic prejudice through programming, preaching and honest examination of Spring Glen Church's own history
- c. Regularly evaluate how Spring Glen Church's Open & Affirming commitment and call to action are reflected in policies, practices and behavior norms, and take steps to address instances where our actions fail to live up to the promise inherent in our words
- d. Inspire and empower our congregation to champion anti-racism and advocate to redress the social injustice and human harm caused by other "isms" prevalent in society
- e. Develop and live a bold, hopeful strategy to address climate change and promote environmental justice through practice, public witness, and outreach
- f. Strengthen and expand connections with other justice-minded groups and initiatives
- g. Establish a dynamic online public presence that projects an inviting, inspiring, and challenging model of a vibrant community of faith boldly making a difference as we grow together
- h. Create space and opportunities for public testimony and story sharing that open eyes to the painful suffering of those who are marginalized and the powerful impact of those who advocate against injustice

OUR WORK

*"Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
Let anyone with ears listen." Matthew 13:8-9*

GOAL: Equip and invigorate our paid staff and volunteer leadership with the tools, structures, and support necessary for creative and effective ministries

STRATEGIES:

- a. Implement a staffing model aligned with the strategic priorities of the church, responsive to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the congregation, and respectful of the need for boundaries that promote healthy work-life balance
- b. Promote enthusiastic volunteer engagement in the ministries of the church and build a robust pipeline of lay leaders by helping congregants discern where their individual passions correspond with opportunities to answer God's call
- c. Design a flexible, formal, and sustainable lay leadership structure aligned with identified and evolving operational needs and strategic priorities
- d. Ensure policies, processes and technology infrastructure are appropriate and adequate to support adherence to best practices, efficient church operations, and congregational well-being

- e. Invest in technology tools and training as necessary to enable consistent, timely, and multi-media dissemination of information about worship, programs, and activities to the SGC community and beyond
- f. Manifest our commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability in behavior norms and in more extensive expressions of conservation practice

OUR RESOURCES

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19–21

GOAL: Build a secure and sustainable future on the foundation of carefully stewarded financial resources and physical infrastructure

KEY STRATEGIES:

- a. Allocate budget resources in strategic alignment with Spring Glen Church’s vision, long-term goals, and short-term priorities
- b. Cultivate a faithful, forward-looking culture of Christian generosity that inspires our congregation to make a difference for Spring Glen Church and the wider community through sharing the gifts of time, talent and treasure
- c. Develop, implement, and regularly evaluate a comprehensive plan for inviting, appreciating, and stewarding gifts spanning the entire spectrum of giving, including weekly/monthly offering, special offerings, targeted fundraising campaigns, major gifts, and bequests
- d. Raise awareness about stewardship and consistently communicate with congregants about how their pledges/financial support are used and making a difference
- e. Explore and implement opportunities to generate incremental revenues through grant funding and innovative, mission-aligned initiatives that yield sustainable earned income
- f. Reach out to members of the wider community who have not yet heard our message of welcome and inclusion and invite them to become members of the Spring Glen Church family
- g. Develop a comprehensive long-term plan for upkeep and upgrade of our building and property that addresses the foreseeable needs and call of the church as well as opportunities for community use
- h. Reflect our commitment to inclusion, justice, and environmental sustainability in our buildings and grounds