

Profile Survey Results Specific to our Church Now

The May 2008 survey by the Pastoral Search Committee received 100 responses. Near the end of the survey, we included a series of items about our *Mission and Vision Statement* and about the report, *PATHS For Our Future in a Fast-Changing World*. Although the length of these items and their responses has led us to leave them out of the *Church Profile*, the Committee decided to this summary of results with the congregation. (Percents may not sum to 100% because of rounding.)

A. The Statement of Mission and Vision reflects well what is and should be most important in our faith community.

<i>Strongly agree</i> <u>72%</u>	<i>Somewhat agree</i> <u>21%</u>	<i>Neutral</i> <u>5%</u>	<i>Somewhat disagree</i> <u>2%</u>	<i>Strongly disagree</i> <u>0%</u>
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Comments:

Our congregation expresses general and widespread support for this statement as it reflects the priorities of our faith community, but with a few reservations about what is or is not in it.

- Some members urged that we always strive to live up to what is in this statement
- Some expressed a sense of “ownership,” noting that the statement was created by the church community so it does reflect “who we are and where we want to head”
- Some respondents suggest a greater emphasis in the vision statement on Jesus and on spirituality, to complement its emphasis on mind (intellect) and body (justice work and earth mission)

B. A thoughtful examination of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as they apply in our world today should be central to the spiritual focus of our faith community.

<i>Strongly agree</i> <u>72%</u>	<i>Somewhat agree</i> <u>21%</u>	<i>Neutral</i> <u>4%</u>	<i>Somewhat disagree</i> <u>2%</u>	<i>Strongly disagree</i> <u>0%</u>
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Comments:

Our congregation supports this statement, especially as it applies to the education of our children and youth. Some respondents wonder whether it goes far enough.

- Scripture readings are important; Bible truth is never outdated
- The Old Testament is also powerful and beautiful and it reminds us of our Jewish roots
- Looking to other sources of inspiration and wisdom is also very important
- A few respondents mentioned value in wrestling with traditional claims about Jesus as divine, savior, redeemer, and the anointed one.

In a May 2008 survey of all church members, we asked members to respond to five questions that reflect five of the sections of the *PATHS* report.

(i) *Our church should continue and strengthen its ministry to all people both in our congregation and in the surrounding community.*

<i>Strongly agree</i> <u>83%</u>	<i>Somewhat agree</i> <u>13%</u>	<i>Neutral</i> <u>4%</u>	<i>Somewhat disagree</i> <u>0%</u>	<i>Strongly disagree</i> <u>0%</u>
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Comments:

Many members expressed appreciation that we are doing particularly well in this area. One respondent summed it up by noting that we are not an exclusive club with major interest in its members only; we have a Christian responsibility to reach out to those in need.

(ii) Our church should expand its efforts and resources devoted to education of our children and youth.

Strongly agree <u>80%</u>	Somewhat agree <u>13%</u>	Neutral <u>6%</u>	Somewhat disagree <u>0%</u>	Strongly disagree <u>0%</u>
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Comments:

Our congregation strongly supports expanding efforts and resources directed to the education of our children and youth. They are our future and their integration within our faith community is essential for our church's survival. The demographics of our community suggest that this issue will be a special challenge, and our church has identified a need for a full-time children and youth director. We are presently trying to strengthen communications with children and with parents, and we are working toward including children in all aspects of worship.

(iii) Our church should work in specific ways to promote peace among all people and justice for all persons.

Strongly agree <u>75%</u>	Somewhat agree <u>16%</u>	Neutral <u>5%</u>	Somewhat disagree <u>3%</u>	Strongly disagree <u>1%</u>
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Comments:

Our congregation affirms this value. Members tend to support beginning locally and then working globally. We should respond to human needs in deed as well as in thought. Some respondents favor a preference for work in this area without our being explicitly political.

(iv) Our church should practice unconditional acceptance of all individuals.

Strongly agree <u>88%</u>	Somewhat agree <u>10%</u>	Neutral <u>0%</u>	Somewhat disagree <u>1%</u>	Strongly disagree <u>1%</u>
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Comments:

The congregation overwhelmingly affirms this basic principle of our church life which is thoroughly articulated in the church's Mission and Vision Statement. Further, although the congregation affirms the principle of unconditional acceptance of all, some respondents question whether we are living into this principle fully.

(v) Our church should develop or participate in programs that promote stewardship of all the Earth's resources.

Strongly agree <u>73%</u>	Somewhat agree <u>24%</u>	Neutral <u>4%</u>	Somewhat disagree <u>0%</u>	Strongly disagree <u>0%</u>
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Comments:

Environmental challenges are foremost in the minds of many church members. A very high proportion of the congregation favors involvement in Earth stewardship and justice issues. However, although support is high, a few respondents also wonder whether the church is the best vehicle to address these issues and if they should rank among the church's top mission efforts.

Pastoral Search Committee, August 2008

STATEMENT ON LEADERSHIP IN MINISTRY

The Congregational Church of Middlebury, Vermont

Our church has experienced as much change in the past few years as in the previous twenty years. In just five years, we have moved from the tradition of a pastor who is an executive and manager to one who is a collaborator and resource, and who delegates. We aim to continue and build upon this emerging tradition. The ideal pastor will stimulate, support, nurture, and inspire members of the congregation to assume leadership, to take initiative, and to find creative ways to serve the needs of others both in our community and around the globe. From time to time the pastor will remind us of our core purpose and our priorities. Our members include many effective and experienced leaders. They need a pastor who will become a partner in bringing support and focus to their work. In sum, we want a pastor who will engender and encourage lay leadership and initiatives that arise from the diverse interests and strengths already present in our congregation.

Our church can be characterized as being “on the verge” of significant transition in its theological journey. We have begun to engage new and progressive understandings of the Christian faith, and we are willing to engage each other actively around these important matters. We have become too large and too complex, with too many aspirations arising from our members, for a pastor-manager model to succeed. Yet we are not yet quite large enough, and we lack the resources that would be required, to have two full-time ministers to serve the needs and the varied agendas of the church. Our solution, necessarily, is to take full advantage of the capabilities and dedication of our members while we continue to develop the capacity to move to the next level. The pastoral model that best responds to these realities is one that assumes a partnership and collaboration between the pastor and church leaders.

Our members, nonetheless, seek a pastor who brings strong qualities of pastoral leadership. We will respond to a pastor who possesses a vision for Christianity in the 21st century, as embraced in our unanimously-voted *Statement of Vision and Mission* (appended to this Profile). We expect our pastor to challenge and stretch us with church services and sermons that demonstrate “a love of truth that is a sincere desire to understand how the world is and our place in it.” The pastor will inspire us to be intentional about matters of faith and to find opportunities to act on that faith. A thoughtful examination of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth is important to the congregation, and our members particularly welcome being inspired to put the example modeled by Jesus’ life into daily practice. Members have identified effective preaching, and caring and compassionate ministering, as their highest priorities for the next settled pastor. We seek a pastor who can demonstrate in the pulpit and in personal ministry the compelling presence of a strong leader, coupled with the warmth of one who is also a true friend. Our members have expressed a desire for a pastor who, in addition to encouraging them by example to lead a Christian life, will facilitate personal and congregational spiritual growth.

We consider the pastor’s emphasis on education at all levels—children through adult—as especially important. Our members strongly desire an active and inspiring program for children and youth as we strive to attract more young families. Our increasing strengths that derive from the growing retirement-age segment of our community are important assets as we look for ways to make our church inviting and relevant. For example, we hope to continue and expand upon the successful adult education programs of the past few years, which have especially attracted older members.

Our church warmly embraces a commitment to being open and welcoming to all. We seek a pastor who will help us translate this enthusiasm into action, and who will guide us in expanding our membership while building a more diverse congregation. We are convinced that a person who brings the strengths identified above will be successful in continuing the growth in membership that was already evident during the tenure of our previous pastor. A growing and more diverse congregation will further expand our programming needs and will fuel our aspirations for increased staffing and for an enhanced physical plant.

The challenges facing the Congregational Church are great, and they afford significant opportunities for an energetic and imaginative pastor to empower church members to embrace changes needed to meet these challenges. To our next settled pastor we can promise the cooperation and collaboration of a congregation that is rich in talent, energy, and a desire to grow in its spiritual understanding and in its service to its community and world.

The Pastoral Search Committee

**Margaret Carothers (Co-chair), John Emerson (Co-chair), Adrienne DeLaney, Peter Karpak,
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August 2008