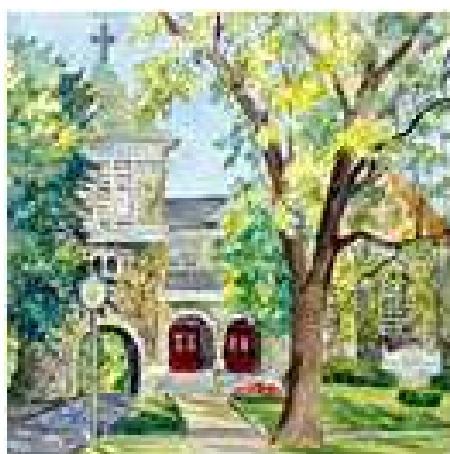


HANCOCK CHURCH: OUR FUTURE TOGETHER



**A Condensed Summary of
Report of the Planning Committee
January, 2008**

I. Introduction

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...”
(*Ecclesiastes 3:1*)

The natural cycle of life is one of seasons, seasons of sowing and reaping, of flowing and ebbing, of maturing and rebirth. Indeed, the derivation of the word season comes from the Latin word for “sow”.

Like all successful and enduring institutions, Hancock Church has experienced many seasons in its life, each one delineated by a time of transition. Hancock is in the midst of one of those transition times, marked in this case by the recent retirement of two long-tenured ministers, as well as by a lay leadership transition, the passing on of Hancock’s stewardship to the “next generation” of its members.

Periodic self-examination is a healthy and necessary part of life; this practice takes on added relevance in times of transition. In the fall of 2006 outgoing Moderator Nariman Behravesh recommended that the church engage in this self-reflection process. Soon after, the Planning Committee was formed.

In a sense, this planning process really got its start during the Listening Campaign. Through this campaign, the yearnings and personal visions of Hancock’s members were wonderfully and powerfully articulated. The deeply personal portrait of our community that emerged became the foundation of the planning process. With the benefit of this head start, the planning team got going in earnest in January, 2007. This report is the culmination of the marvelous journey that ensued.

A natural question: where to from here? Standing Committee will use this document as a guide and as a benchmarking tool for the work of the church. It would be unrealistic to think that every recommendation will be implemented as described—circumstances change, new facts reveal themselves, and ideas evolve. The financial estimates we present are indicative and all expenditures will be subject to Hancock’s customary budget process. Our physical plant will be the subject of its own in-depth study and funding. We do hope, however, that the core vision we present for *how* we are a church together is actively pursued.

In closing, it has been a privilege to lead this process. Our sense of pride and hope for the future of this congregation couldn’t be greater, nor could we be more excited about calling Hancock Church our spiritual home.

Respectfully submitted,

The Planning Committee

Congregational Care: Carol Bukys, Poppy Coffin, Connie Devereux, Larry Link

Learning: Dave Cushing, Connie Gregg, Andy McClaine

Music & the Arts: Carol Counihan, Martha Groves, Cheryl Kraley, Mike Kraley, Nate Martin

Physical Plant: Bill Erickson, Dean Rutila

Service: Charlotte Dougherty, Faith Fenske, Amy Swanson, Janet Voit

Stewardship & Endowment: Al Bukys, Dick Dougherty, Larry Link

Worship: Bill Erickson, Martha Groves

Advisors: John Campbell, Ellis Johnson, John Foster, Robin DiGiammarino,
Susan Rockwell, Dana Allen Walsh

Special thanks to: Jim Messenger and Sam Altschuler.

II. Planning Process Objectives

“Planning is a structured conversation about what a group of people believe God calls them to be or do. The goal of the planning process is to structure the conversation people need in order to shape agreement and enthusiasm to pursue what they believe God calls them to be or do.”¹

Our charge was clear: to create a vision and a plan for our future by:

- Building on the work of the Listening Campaign by talking with members to discover their deepest yearnings in all important areas of our church’s life.
- Discerning Hancock’s timeless values and key strengths.
- Studying and incorporating recent writings on congregational fulfillment and vitality.
- Synthesizing and prioritizing the resulting ideas and action recommendations into a coherent plan.

The overarching goal is to rediscover God’s purpose for us as a family of faith.

The plan itself is meant to describe in some detail our church’s calling in each significant area of our life together, state our goals in those areas for the foreseeable future, and identify both the contextual changes and the resources that will be required to achieve them. More specifically, we sought to capture and extend the renewed sense of spiritual purpose that the Listening Campaign has infused in us and help guide Hancock as it navigates its leadership transition.

Here are a few examples of the kinds of questions we have tried to answer through this process:

- How can we better meet the needs of young families, parents and children alike?
- What would it take to revitalize the youth music program?
- How can we make the music in our Sunday services more accessible and meaningful to more of the congregation?
- What kind of support system will help ensure that we are properly caring for one another, whether we are in need or simply trying to find our place at Hancock?
- How can we better engage the Hancock community in outreach opportunities that deepen relationships among ourselves and with those we serve, while providing meaningful spiritual growth?
- What are the best ways to provide youth-oriented worship opportunities?
- In what ways do we think our church facilities can better reflect our identity?

¹ Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute)

III. Findings and Recommendations

We invested much of our time into building the “foundation” of this plan, i.e. making sure that we understood Hancock’s culture, values, and desires to the best of our ability. This was an extremely rewarding part of the process, in part because it genuinely enhanced our sense of purpose and reaffirmed the core reasons why we choose to associate as a faith community. This investment also made the rest of the process more fluid and more coherent. By having a surer sense of where we came from and who we are today, it became much easier to define a vision for our future.

a. Pillars

The first category of our findings is what came to be known as “pillars”. These pillars can be loosely defined as those attributes that lie at heart of Hancock’s identity. Some of these attributes are common to all faith communities and some are not. Collectively, however, in both their identity and their relative importance, they define Hancock as a unique family of God with our own special purpose.

Community: *Loving, Caring, Welcoming*

Worship: *Seeking, Praising*

Learning: *Growing, Equipping, Connecting*

Service: *Doing Justice, Helping Others*

Appropriately, these themes underlie our vision for Hancock and permeate this plan.

b. Values

While our identity and our values are tightly linked, they are not the same thing. If our identity describes *who* we are, our values describe *how* and *why* we are. The values identified below were developed over the early months of the planning process. Like the pillars identified above, these values became an essential ingredient in the vision and planning process:

Love: *Love lies at the heart of all we do.*

Justice: *Works are an essential part of our faith*

Spiritual Transformation: *We seek to grow and transform our spirits, especially through worship, learning, and service.*

Community: *To be a vital family of faith, we must actively connect with and care for each other*

c. Yearnings

Yearnings are another important aspect of our findings. Through this process and more importantly the Listening Campaign that preceded it, we have also learned a lot about specific yearnings of our congregation.

Not unlike our values, there was remarkable consistency across members of the congregation about what we want to get out of our personal investments in the Hancock

community. Also importantly, much of what we heard about our members' yearnings was consistent with what we read in the literature related to the need for mainline Christian churches to adapt to changing societal needs without compromising our values.

The key yearnings that the discernment process revealed are:

- A deeper, more meaningful sense of community and mutual care.
- More varied and fulfilling worship experiences.
- Regular engagement in Christian and related learning.
- More personally meaningful involvement in outreach.
- More active engagement of our Covenant of Welcome.
- Better identification of what makes our community of faith unique and special (Hancock's "brand").
- Wider sharing of our identity with the world.

d. Topic Team Findings and Recommendations

This section contains summaries of our recommendations in each of the principal topic areas:

Ministries

Worship
Music & the Arts
Congregational Care
Learning
Service

Foundations

Physical Plant
Stewardship & Endowment

The goals and action steps contained in these summaries are in many respects the "guts" of this plan. They are where theory meets practice and they are the most visible manifestation of our identity and our values. As time goes on, they are also the obvious place to look for "metrics" of whether or not we are succeeding in implementing this plan.

We take this characterization one step further to say that our success in accomplishing these action recommendations will primarily be a reflection of how well we are doing at building community, at keeping love at our center, at actively engaging our spiritual development, and at accompanying our faith with works.

These action recommendations are also the source of most of the plan's resource requirements. These requirements, in the form of additional money, pastoral resources, number of volunteers, and volunteer hours, are included in each summary. In Section VI, "Tying It All Together: Resource Analysis", the individual estimates are aggregated and presented in their totality.

WORSHIP

Key idea

Worship is the most important expression of our life as a family of faith and must nourish our spirits.

Goals (Worship Planning & Space)

- Plan thematic “seasons” throughout the church year, and shorten the planning horizon to allow for more flexibility.
- Work for better balance among nourishing heart/soul/mind in worship service.
- Establish a Worship Team to support and act as sounding board for clergy and others involved in planning of services. The team will consist of Clergy, Deacons, Music, Service, Learning, and HYG officers.
- Give the sanctuary a facelift.

Goals (Worship Service Form & Content)

- Allow for more variation within a core worship service framework for the Sunday morning service.
- Consider accessibility of hymns sung by the congregation when selecting them.
- Introduce more alternative worship times/forms.
- Increase “touch”: greeting before service, connecting during service, signing in, lay participation, fellowship after the service.

Action Steps

- Additional thematic “seasons” might be theologically-based or relate to the unique life of Hancock Church (e.g., Faith Promise, Mission). Integrate elements of worship around thematic “seasons,” and coordinate with other ministries of the church (e.g., learning, service).
- Have more sermons that address contemporary, social, relevant issues.
- Enhance worship experience with more contemplative elements, providing quiet opportunities to “listen” to the spirit.
- Institute regular meetings of the Worship Team to plan for worship. The goal is to create greater continuity in the content of worship services, as well as other aspects of church life.
- Clean, paint, and “refresh” Sanctuary and Narthex to be more warm and welcoming.
- Conduct monthly “family” services at non-traditional times; “Worship another Way” in conjunction with Confirmation Class and HYG on Sunday evenings; Integrated Worship-Learning-Music and The Arts services.

MUSIC & THE ARTS

Key Idea

Music & The Arts have the power to transform us and hold a cherished place in Hancock's life.

Goals

- Increase resources to support choir, youth, instrumental, and performing arts programs.
- Establish a “full-scale” Music and the Arts Committee.
- Broaden the diversity of the music to make it both more accessible and appealing to a greater number of segments of the congregation.

Action Steps

- Add staff to the Music & The Arts program with the goal of getting back to the staffing level in the 90s when the music staff was composed of 4 professionals. Staff should have different and complementary skills to meet the diverse needs of the program (organ, choir, instruments, bells, children, dance, drama, visual arts).
- Music and the Arts Committee would seek to turn ideas for artistic expression into meaningful contributions for worship, community, learning, and outreach. It would also serve as a resource for the music staff in assessing new ideas and implementing programs. Many ideas have emerged that we can pass on to the Music Committee as suggestions for achieving goals. For example:
 - Have more opportunities for congregational participation so that the congregation feels more engaged and is actively participating in the worship experience.
 - Seek to build new musical groups by creating separate choirs that specialize in other musical genres rather than asking the chancel choir to perform styles with which they are uncomfortable.
 - Encourage and support the musical and artistic groups to take their talents to shut-ins, nursing homes, and retirement communities as a form of pastoral care to our members and their families.
 - Look for opportunities to weave music into other church activities and groups, such as youth group meetings, committee meetings, Bible study groups, Collier Club, and Lunch Bunch.

CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Key idea

The roots of community are nourished by care, for which we are all responsible to one another.

Goals

- Establish lay care-giving as a core ministry at Hancock.
- Set up special care teams (e.g. elderly, sick, bereaved, newcomers) to help ensure diverse needs of the congregation are met.
- Significantly increase visits and other care activities.

Action Steps

- Identify special “care categories” as noted in the Goals.
- Determine how best and in what areas lay people can provide care.
- Equip members for this ministry by forming small groups specialized by category. Small groups will receive training (via a combination of internal and external resources) in their chosen area(s) specialty. Clergy will mentor these groups.
- Reach out to other congregations/resources that can serve as models and/or information sources.
- Consider defining a special sub-group of Deacons or separate “care teams” to perform vital care visits.
- Monitor progress to ensure care is being allocated properly.
- Arrange staff support for scheduling/reporting/reminder system for volunteers and to encourage “feedback” loop for appropriate/important issues.
- Re-evaluate Parish Nurse role and how it will integrate with Hancock’s expanded care network.
- Coordinate/partner with Membership Committee to provide care for new and distant members, including recruiting volunteers for follow-up visits.
- Determine how best to integrate “Hancock Home Helpers” and “SAGE” ideas.
- Maintain if not enhance “As Time Goes By;” consider coordinating with external faith communities or opening up to the Town of Lexington at appropriate time.
- Consider expansion of present Collation activities, both to educate congregants on death and dying (group study/discussion topic?) as well as to perform specific care during the 12-18 months following a loss.
- Design/execute comprehensive communication strategy.

LEARNING

Key idea

Learning is a lifelong, integral aspect of our spiritual development and builds community.

Goals

- Broaden recognition that learning is one of the most powerful ways of building community with a congregation
- Establish regular participation in learning as cultural norm at Hancock.
- Upgrade/better coordinate the learning experience.
- More fully integrate learning into Sunday mornings.
- Better equip, support, and celebrate our teachers, and accord them the high status and esteem that they deserve
- Rescue young parents from the Sunday School Trap.

Action Steps

- Bring about a cultural shift *away* from the expectation that young parents are responsible for teaching their child's/children's Sunday School class and *toward* the expectation that the rest of the community will "step up" to this most important spiritual formation ministry.
- Elevate the status of teachers by more regularly recognizing their contributions to learning at Hancock.
- Improve support for and reduce stress on our volunteer teachers by restoring the position of Religious Ed professional to oversee/coordinate learning, including teacher training and curriculum, particularly for the K-5 church school.
- Harness the power of teacher training and apprenticeship as a means for setting up new teachers for success. Teaching is a skilled art that we should not expect beginners to learn by the "sink or swim" method.
- Work with the clergy and the proposed Worship Team to design opportunities for teachers to receive spiritual refreshment outside of regular worship/learning time.
- Establish "community time" after church as a cultural norm, primarily as an opportunity to participate in a variety of high quality learning and other community building activities for both adults and children.
- Improve the middle school learning experience by: a) offering (*in addition to* Sunday morning JYO class) the "Our Whole Lives – Sexuality and our Faith" program for 8th graders and b) introducing a new curriculum for Sunday morning JYO classes.
- Maintain the excellence of the HYG program.

SERVICE

Key idea

Service, outreach, and justice lie at the core of Hancock's ethos.

Goals

- Achieve 100% participation of the congregation in Hancock's service program.
- Establish Hancock as a leader among faith communities in service/justice/outreach.

Action Steps

- Articulate goals, criteria, and a strategy for maximum impact, connections, and spiritual growth through service/outreach. The strategy will designate a balance of hands-on direct service, financial contributions, educational opportunities, and worship experiences, and also clarify that service/outreach at Hancock is part of all aspects of church life and not limited to Christian Service committee activities.
- Provide multiple and varied opportunities for hands-on involvement, ensuring that there is something for everyone. Opportunities should include an annual week-long adult mission trip, family-oriented activities, and local one-time projects.
- Establish a multi-year theme around which to focus/deepen service work.
- Tie worship and learning themes to our mission work.
- Support and encourage the clergy to be champions for social justice.
- Collaborate with other faith communities on social justice issues.
- Invite guest speakers who inspire us to social action (especially through Jesus' teachings) and expand our understanding of the needs of others. Invite the community.
- Design and execute a comprehensive communication strategy that includes:
 - a) Revitalizing the Christian Service page of the website (e.g., add "Learn more," "Get involved, and "Resources" information).
 - b) Publishing a monthly bulletin in the Herald with: list of opportunities and sign-up information, list of accomplishments, testimonials from participants, and thanks from those served.
 - c) Developing a "list serve" that provides information to members particularly interested in service/outreach, but may not be regular Sunday attendees or readers of the Herald.
 - d) Increasing exposure outside of Hancock through Lexington Minuteman, UCC Mass. Conference, Lexington Interfaith Television, Church World Service, Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), etc.

STEWARDSHIP AND ENDOWMENT

Key idea

Stewardship—the intentional, wise, and generous use God’s many gifts to us—is the essence of Christian practice and should become more ingrained at Hancock.

Goals

- Actively, regularly explore what it means to practice good stewardship, both as individuals and as a congregation.
- To increase the “gift literacy” of our members, i.e. our ability to identify and use our gifts in the ways that Jesus taught us.
- Reduce the “top heaviness” of our distribution of contributors.

Action Steps

- Adopt a clear, visible, and inclusive position on the role of Stewardship in our faith journey – a “Statement on Stewardship at Hancock”.
- Leadership from the Pulpit: An understanding of the biblical foundations for living a life of generosity starts with sermons on the topic. We should offer such sermons throughout the year, not only near Faith Promise Sunday.
- Discussion and study groups: While inspiration can come from sermons, more often life changing experiences happen in small groups. At least once a year, offer a bible study or book discussion group on a stewardship topic to encourage deep reflection on our financial choices.
- New Member discussion: As we adopt a visible position on stewardship in the life of Hancock members, discuss that position with people during the new member process.
- Increase the visibility of giving during the service, especially while the children are present.
- Identify opportunities for targeted capital giving.
- Expand the number of members giving to the Endowment and setting up charitable trusts/annuities for the benefit of Hancock; facilitate the establishment of such vehicles.

PHYSICAL PLANT

Key idea

Hancock's buildings are a critical community asset and yet are somewhat under-maintained, energy-inefficient, and require upgrades to safety systems and accessibility.

Goals

- Make Hancock a welcoming, accessible facility for all users
- Ensure that all safety and sanitary codes are being met
- Address key deferred maintenance issues
- Significantly improve the church's energy efficiency

Action Steps

- Ask the Prudential Committee to form a Physical Plant Task Force consisting of two teams respectively charged with a) developing an integrated building improvement plan, and b) carrying out a capital campaign to fund the recommended improvements.

e. **Spiritual Practices**

Much of the planning process and resulting vision can be summarized as a celebration of Hancock's known strengths as a community of faith. Our vision can be viewed simply as a call to re-engage these strengths in fresh ways. Through the Planning Team's readings, we discovered that we have a lot of company among mainline protestant congregations in this regard.

In many ways life at Hancock going forward will be quite familiar. However, we hope there will also be some important changes, not to our theology or our culture, and especially not to our values, but rather to how we are community together.

Our readings suggested that one of the most important success factors among congregations that had successfully reinvigorated themselves was the conscientious adoption of a core set of spiritual practices. This assertion naturally grabbed our attention. As we studied and discussed and experimented with them, we came to believe that the durability of our congregational vitality depends critically on adopting practices such as holy conversation, spiritual discernment, and intentional listening. They have the potential to foster at Hancock a more vibrant community of faith, one in which we actively grow our spirits, affirm our relationships, and increase our sense of connectedness with God and one another.

While such practices are not new (and in fact most are quite ancient), many mainline churches have simply lost sight of them due to a variety of religious and social pressures. There is nothing strange or theologically radical about any of them. The following is a brief summary of how the most important ones were used in the process and how they can become an important facet of life at Hancock. More detailed explanations of what these practices are can be found in the Appendix.

1. Holy Conversation: Though holy conversation takes a variety of forms, at its heart, that conversation recognizes the presence of the holy spirit in sharing. It involves speaking and listening with deep understanding. This practice was really the essence of the Listening Campaign and was used extensively throughout the planning process as well. As of this writing hundreds of our members have participated in holy conversation and can attest how its intentionality makes it a truly different and much more spiritually fulfilling way of communicating. Many of us have extended its use to "other parts" of our lives and enjoyed its benefits there, too.

2. Spiritual Discernment: Spiritual discernment is a means through which we seek to understand our desires and discover God's purpose. In our planning, we tried to leave room for the spirit by not rushing the planning process and by creating space for silence in our times of community. One of our core practices was to acknowledge the role of the spirit and actively ask whether our direction was spirit-led.

3. Intentionality: The heart of intentionality is to examine our actions, especially those regarding relationships, and ask ourselves if those actions are in harmony with God's will. We feel that our acknowledgement and pursuit of intentionality throughout the planning process, imperfect though it was, helped us to build community and to more fully recognize its importance. We believe that Hancock should greatly encourage learning and practice of intentionality in all aspects of our individual and congregational lives.

4. Practicing Congregation: A Practicing Congregation actively engages its faith and is unwilling to conceive of spiritual life as a passive activity that happens once a week on Sunday mornings. Through the planning process and other aspects of church life, we catch glimpses of what it is to be such a congregation. We believe that making a whole-hearted commitment to be a practicing congregation can revitalize Hancock Church.

f. Communication

At Hancock, we communicate through a wide array of channels. Currently, our primary communication channels include:

- Television (including broadcast worship service and Faith at Work)
- E-mail groups (general broadcast and specific interest groups)
- Announcements (verbal by minister, and written in the weekly order of service)
- Newsletter (Hancock Herald)
- Special-purpose mailings
- Hancock Church web site
- Newspaper articles and advertising

For the most part, these channels operate independently of one another and have widely varying forms and degrees of governance. We believe that Hancock Church would benefit greatly from having a more centralized communication strategy and governance structure, i.e. a Communication Committee. This committee would be responsible for making sure that our various communication channels are functioning well and staying appropriately current with technological change.

We have requested that Standing Committee form a Communication Working Group to propose and implement shorter-term enhancements to our communications, and to develop a strategic plan proposal for communications at Hancock. Due to its time-sensitivity, this request has already been discussed and accepted by Standing Committee.

IV. Tying It All Together: A Vision for Hancock

In looking back over all of the information that we have gathered along our journey, two feelings seem to rise above the rest: **Community** and **Love**.

We have learned from our planning journey that the single most important measure of the health of a congregation is the extent to which its members are connected in community. **Congregations that intentionally work to diversify and strengthen the bonds among their members and with the communities around them thrive.**

Thus, our vision for Hancock is that each member recognizes the vital importance of these truths, actively encounters Hancock in ways that strengthen community, and endeavors to place love at the heart of all we do.

We feel quite certain that if we answer this call as a congregation, a renewed, sustainable vitality and sense of purpose awaits. To help us get there, we have identified and urge the adoption of a series of spiritual practices as an integral part of how we go about being a community of faith in God.

As time goes by and we assess the success of this planning process and the listening campaign that came before it, we must consider foremost the degree to which Hancock is a closer community and its members more loving neighbors, both to each other and throughout the “global village”.

Resource Analysis

The new initiatives that committees and others may undertake as an outgrowth of this plan may lead to additional funding requests and other resource requirements. With this in mind, we asked each topic team to estimate the **incremental** financial and other resource impact over the next three years for their respective topics if all recommendations contained in this report were pursued. The details underlying all resource requests are contained in the full report for each topic area. **This analysis is static**, i.e. we have not tried to quantify either the savings in other areas that may result from these changes or the increased giving that we believe is likely. .

It bears repeating here that any actual incremental spending that occurs as a result of this plan is subject to the normal budget process.

VI. Conclusion

In the end, this planning process has been a microcosm of our vision for Hancock’s future, a future built on communities within the larger community, communities that are intimate enough to allow vulnerability to each other and before God, communities that practice an intentional and growing spirituality.

Throughout this process, we have worked hard, become a small community, bared our souls to one another, and had a lot of fun along the way. Having poked, prodded, and peered into just about every corner of the church, we are highly confident that Hancock’s foundations are firm and we will thrive for yet another generation.

Closing Prayer

May God bless our holy conversations, filling our hearts with love, our tongues with patience and gentleness, and our ears with understanding. May we leave room for the Holy Spirit to dwell among us and within us, to be heard, and to draw us ever closer together. May the love of Christ be with all of us as we recall his teaching, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”