

# St. John's UCC Future Together

## Strategic Plan for 2026 - 2027

January 25, 2026 | A Living Document

### STRATEGIC GOALS

#### Theme: Spiritual Deepening

Goal #1: Center prayer practices as a critical and crucial part of individual and communal life as Christians

#### We Are Committed to:

- Creating a variety of opportunities and experiences for people to connect to God and each other.
- Experimenting different prayer and meditation practices in our communal life

#### Action Steps:

- By June 2026, provide a meditation space for individual and group usage—enhance participation
- By September 2026, Hold “Prayer in Nature” opportunities in outdoor areas around Franklin County (Caledonia, Camp, Norlo Park, etc.)
- By September 2026, Hold a gathering for prayer at the Labyrinth (maintaining and introducing it to members of our church community)
- By December 2026 Create a weekly prayer group, without the expectation of being present each week
- By December 2026, Encourage prayer partners

- Discuss with office technical staff as to feasibility of setting up a rotating prayer partner group - every four months
- The aim is to have everyone in the church know that someone in the church is praying for them (randomization rather than relying on prayer chain/wall/yoys and concerns)
- By Spring 2027, consider holding an “Easter Vigil” or similar experience in Lent

## Goal #2: Expand upon our existing worship styles and practices

### **We Are Committed to:**

- Exploring multiple formats and timing of worship.
- Maintaining our connection with each other, regardless of the service we attend.
- Marrying our past with our future.
- Engaging with our congregation and the community for ideas, seeking input from a variety of generational groups.
- Recognizing that people worship in many ways

### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026 create exchanges with other churches (perhaps pulpit or choir)
- By December 2026 form a worship design team to share ideas in worship planning
- By December 2026, offer additional contemporary/blended worship services, exploring options outside of the Sanctuary and possible use of Fellowship Hall
- By August 2026, install livestreaming equipment in Fellowship Hall to expand options for worship and community events
- By September 2026, revisit our roots and traditions that may have fallen by the wayside
  - Provide opportunities for people to share what they need and/or miss

## Goal #3: Provide additional faith formation and spiritual study opportunities, helping members and friends to connect more deeply with the Divine

### **We Are Committed to:**

- Increasing Bible study and discussion groups, providing forums for people to study and pray together.
- Creating four-to-six-week classes for adults, allowing for long-term learning without long-term commitment.
- Providing time and space to pray, meditate, and study

### **Action Steps:**

- By June 2026, offer adult classes with topics of interest

- Appoint a rotating group of 3-4 individuals to plan activities for a 3-month period (i.e. a group of 3-4 individuals who do this for each 3-month period for church school time from September to May each church year) (some opportunities may be offered over the summer, June-August)
  - By September 2026, offer classes about UCC history and beliefs, current UCC statements of faith and action, and ways to implement resolutions made at UCC General Synod
    - Information to be included in ongoing membership classes
    - Perhaps a one-hour session offered for all who wish to refresh their knowledge of this in Spring 2026
    - Increase understanding of those from differing theological backgrounds
  - By Spring 2027, create small group studies on daily practices of faith, including mystics, prayer, etc.
    - Consider: good books on other religions are available
  - By December 2027, schedule quarterly retreats (theological and/or practical)
  - By December 2026, consider opportunities to engage and connect with those who are still seeking a spiritual home
  - By December 2027, create a book of spiritual reflections written by members of the SJUCC community
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## **Theme: Energize Participation**

### Goal #1: Increase communication across platforms and groups

#### We Are Committed To:

- Ensuring our members and friends have access to accurate information about activities, events, programs, and opportunities to be involved in the ministries of St. John's UCC.
- Developing our presence and usage of social media.
- Using our website homepage for current information and encouraging followers.
- Recognizing communication must be timely, open, and easily understood

#### Action Steps:

- By June 2026
  - Research and implement a variety of advertising options, including social media
  - Develop an annual communications and marketing plan to promote congregational identity and events
  - Creating a monthly calendar of events in the Spirit may be helpful and more flexible than creating a year-long listing of events
  - Frequent posting of events and invitations, particularly on social media—use a schedule

- By June 2026, update and keep our website current with dynamic content
- By June 2026, utilize Facebook as our primary platform and explore additional platforms such as Instagram to reach other demographics
  - Encourage engagement with our content from the congregation
- By December 2026, advertise activities well in advance, via multiple channels
- By June 2026, plan events 2 or more months in advance for more help, encouragement, and possible partnerships or sponsorships of the events
- By Spring 2027, explore using Constant Contact for text messages

## Goal #2: Create a leadership base that is focused on the future and equipped for the current challenges of church life

### We Are Committed to:

- Utilizing the skills, gifts, and knowledge of our members and friends to lead us, knowing that we are called to “equip the saints for ministry”;
- Surveying and listening for passion will enable group leadership.
- Saying “yes” to new ideas and practices, particularly from newer voices.
- Encouraging respectful conversation that models an openness to change

### Action Steps:

- By July 2026—Host a Council Retreat
  - Have one Council/congregational gathering
- By December 2026, create partnerships with other churches to accomplish shared goals, especially related to mission and outreach

## Goal #3: Review the official ministries and committees of the church to align with the current mission, vision, and values of our strategic plan

### We Are Committed to:

- Creating/Developing the standing committee structures that encourage short-term commitment and engagement.

### Action Steps

- By March 2026, Pilot ad-hoc committees rather than standing ministry teams to plan and execute events
- By summer 2026, Review and revise the Camp Policies (in conjunction with the Camp Ministry Team) (ask Camp Ministry and those who love Camp to lead this effort)
- By December 2026, coordinate the timing of youth activities with committee meetings

## Theme: Community Engagement

Goal #1: Be visible and engaged as a church through developing strong community partnerships

### We Are Committed to:

- Partnering and expanding our mission and ministry beyond Sunday morning.
- Working with other churches and organizations to increase our impact.
- Offering opportunities to participate in a variety of short-term and long-term projects.

### Action Steps:

- By April 2026, engage in outreach projects with a community partner
  - Primary partners include: NETwork Ministries, SCCAP, Habitat for Humanity
- By March 2026, develop Community Engagement Standing Committee
- By December 2026, promote us/our uniqueness (e.g. ONA)
  - Sponsor community events such as Franklin County Pride, Race Against Poverty
- By December 2026, perhaps you will combine youth groups with other churches
  - In consultation with Roxanne, explore and implement shared youth group
  - Consider potential youth partnerships with Calvary UMC
- By April 2026 hold quarterly presentations-- utilize our building for learning and service
- By December 2026, help address homelessness within the wider community
  - Identify community partners to plug into existing efforts
- By December 2026, hold simulations, discussions and events with community partners inviting members and friends to participate
  - Plan a poverty simulation partnering with SCCAP and United Way

Goal #2: Optimize St. John's Camp to better serve the wider community

### We Are Committed to:

- Exploring options to better utilize the beauty of St. John's Camp.
- Re-evaluating the camp access and rental process.
- Reviewing options to update parts of the camp

### Action Steps:

- By June 2026 Form an ad-hoc committee or task force of people passionate about Camp to consider additional camp usage (programming) beyond current offerings
  - Hold casual Sunday evening worship services at camp
  - Promote camp events within Cowan's Gap State Park and the surrounding area
  - Make our camp available for daily or weekend events (May to September)
  - Create opportunities for use by other churches, community groups, etc.
  - Offer camp as a "rustic retreat"

- Connect with the movement of people who are interested in nature, “back to the land” and similar concepts, perhaps with a goal of teaching skills
- Consider designing a VBS program to be held at Camp and/or hold a VBS follow-up activity at Camp
- By December 2026, form an ad-hoc committee to review camp needs and opportunities, including:
  - Having an assessment of the land/buildings for the camp might be something to be done so that we have a sense of just what we’re dealing with
  - There is the potential for selling off land
  - Explore conservation programs that might help with the preservation of the land; Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or similar program
  - Rely on experts to do the actual work/classes, rather than internal SJUCC folks
  - Add pictures of existing facilities to the Camp section of the website

Goal #3: Make St. John’s UCC a community hub for learning, service, fun and support

**We Are Committed to:**

- Increasing St. John’s visibility in the community.
- Utilizing St. John’s building and grounds as a community meeting space for a variety of meaningful and educational events.
- Hosting community groups looking for space

**Action Steps:**

- By June 2026, utilize our kitchen and fellowship hall for community events
- By December 2026, offer classes open to the public on a variety of topics; facilitators can be from within the church or a community partner
  - Examples include money management, financial literacy, new parents, conflict resolution/management, vacation planning, autism education, first aid, mental health first aid, crafts, end-of-life care, investing, music, local history, self-help, nutrition (look within as we develop contacts)
- By December 2026, maintain a list of people to share their areas of expertise/knowledge/skill building, etc.
  - Offer regular opportunities for such experts to share their talents with others
- By Fall 2026, hold art shows and similar events for artisans, crafters, etc.
- By December 2026, revamp Fellowship Hall into a multi-use space
- By December 2027, sponsor a “Cars and Coffee” car show

Goal #4: Continue to live in our Covenant of Welcome and Affirmation as an Open and Affirming Church

**We Are Committed to:**

- Partnering with existing community organizations working with marginalized populations.
- Incorporating aspects of our covenant in our worship life together.
- Providing space for marginalized groups needing a safe and secure space to meet

### **Action Steps:**

- Continue in 2026, expand our witness as an ONA church in the wider community
    - Promote and participate in Racial Reconciliation, Pride, Mental Health events, etc. Be part of events and activities planned by organizations whose mission is similar to/overlaps with our ONA covenant
  - Continuing in 2026, engage in community events, providing optimal opportunities for interaction and exchange with the diversity within our wider community
  - By December 2027, consider offering the “Our Whole Lives” (OWL) or similar programs
    - Partner with appropriate organizations for training and facilitators
    - Identify stakeholders who would be interested in participating
    - Offer for a variety of age groups, perhaps starting with adults/older adults
    - Explore grants to engage in this work
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## **Theme: Congregational Care**

Goal #1: Support and encourage the members and friends of St. John’s, centering relationships as crucial for our life together as Christians

### **We Are Committed to:**

- Continuing and expanding the Called to Care philosophy.
- Providing a safe and confidential place for people to go for support.
- Developing relationships with each other

### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026, create a team of people to follow-up with those who shared prayer concerns during worship (cards, calls, etc.)
  - Begin anytime and increase the number of people doing so by November 2026
- By June 2026, intentionally follow-up with visitors (ideally within 2 weeks)
- By December 2026, offer kids’ activities that are relevant and of interest to them
- By December 2026, confirm church membership by reaching out to all members on an annual basis
  - This will be done by the elders as part of Congregational Care
- By December 2026, ask one question of the congregation (survey) on a monthly or quarterly basis to ensure feedback is being sought by Council
- By December 2026, hold adult weekend retreats, with childcare and meals provided
- By December 2026, engage and experiment with multi-generational events and projects

Goal #2: Encourage small group formation to allow a variety of opportunities

**We Are Committed to:**

- Creating small groups that enhance our personal contact with one another.
- Building community and connections among people.
- Offering opportunities that are relevant, timely, and build people's capacity for change

**Action Steps:**

- By Spring 2026, survey members and friends to learn more about their interests
- By Spring 2026, identify facilitators for small groups, both spiritual and action-oriented
- By December 2026, involve children and youth in various activities and programs
  - Poll kids and parents to gauge interest and availability
- By December 2026, increase personal contact with members/friends, especially those who worship virtually
- Continue 2026 and onward, schedule quarterly (or so) major events
  - Includes music programs/concerts, fellowship, fun, etc.

Goal #3: Expanding our church-wide culture of caring

**We Are Committed to:**

- Working to ensure all members and friends experience caring and welcome.
- Working together to create additional ways to welcome.
- Offering personal stories to help us know each other.
- Practicing acceptance and compassion with all

**Action Steps:**

- By June 2026, incorporate new people with intentional welcome and invitations to activities and events
  - By December 2026, experiment with dinner church, feature storytelling and community building
  - By December 2026, create a welcome visitor and follow-up team to include incorporating new people with intentional welcome and invitations to activities and events
  - By December 2027, offer small groups for support and encouragement, particularly around life transitions and/or grief
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## **Theme: Financial Sustainability**

Goal #1: Develop multifaceted revenue streams to support the mission and vision of the church

### **We Are Committed to:**

- Not relying on any one income source to fund our internal ministries and programs.
- Promoting a variety of formats for offering (e.g. Vanco, EFT, stocks);
- Increasing different revenue streams using events and sponsorships.
- Developing our financial resources to support engagement in the wider community

### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026, create events (including fundraisers) to support the mission and vision of St. John's
- By December 2027, increase the proportion of electronic giving units (such as Vanco and EFT)
- By December 2026, hold special events that fund programming and projects, seeking sponsorships for the events
- By December 2026, create special giving opportunities to fund new initiatives
- By May 2027, identify and make use of grant income to fund projects

Goal #2: Increase rental opportunities and sponsorships with community partners and others for short- and long-term use, generating dependable and sustainable income

### **We Are Committed to:**

- Increasing our funding base to support the financial needs of St. John's, particularly those related to maintenance of the building and grounds.
- Generating income through outside groups using our facilities.
- Opening our building for a variety of income-generating partnerships.
- Increasing our network of community sponsors as a source of revenue for events

### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026, hold lectures and concerts that generate funding and get people in the door
- By December 2027, advertise events with Facebook ads using geo-targeting as a low-cost option to promote increased participation
- By December 2026, explore alternative uses for some of our real estate properties
- By December 2026, offer programs that people pay to attend (spend money rather than give money)

### Goal #3: Encourage estate planning with gifts to St. John's

#### **We Are Committed to:**

- Implementing a planned giving campaign to encourage members to make legacy gifts to continue the mission and ministry of St. John's.
- Ensuring our members and friends are aware of St. John's dreams and goals for the future, with this strategic plan as a guide.

#### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026, work with the Finance Task Force to implement a planned giving process
  - Bring in an outside expert to share with us an informational process for planning to give
  - Schedule at a time convenient for the people who would be our target; this might need to be during the day rather than at night; may also be something that we can offer more than once
- By December 2026, share a variety of planned giving options such as leaving stock, naming SJUCC as a beneficiary in a will, listing SJUCC as beneficiary of a life insurance policy, etc.

### Goal #4: Explore creative ways to structure and sustain the church

#### **We Are Committed to:**

- Identifying opportunities and options to sustain our financial future into the long term

#### **Action Steps:**

- By December 2026, form a task force to develop scenarios with creative ways to structure the church's financial position, including but not limited to:
  - Renting space to other congregations and/or organizations
  - Considering alternative uses of our current campus
- By December 2026, this task force shall make recommendations to Council regarding viable pathways forward
- By December 2027, form a generosity/stewardship team
- By December 2027, draw on the wisdom, resources and ideas of UCC and partner denominations to support and sustain our church