

Section D: Core Values, Vision, Mission and Ministry

1. We want you to tell us about this congregation.
 - a) Name you have chosen for the congregation: The First Congregational United Church of Christ.

b) Tell us the story of why you chose this name.

First Congregational United Church of Christ was founded in Northern California town of Santa Rosa in 1888 as the First Congregational Church. In 1961, we joined the new denomination and added "United Church of Christ" to our name.

2. Do you use United Church of Christ in the public identification of your congregation?

Yes

3. I am new in your community/area; please describe your church to me (Please limit to 2-3 paragraphs)

We are the First Congregational United Church, of Christ. An active and lively bunch of God's people, we are a tight community that is always open to others – new members and friends. People who come here find that we are loving and kind to one another and that they are quickly received into our community. We have a multi-cultural Sunday School which we share with our sister congregation, the First Samoan Congregational Christian Church, United Church of Christ. Once a month we worship with them at our communion service.

If you come to worship with us, you will notice that our worship services are filled with life. They definitely are not boring. We sing lively hymns and, on occasion, the minister and congregation dialogue with one another during sermon time. Prayer is vital to our congregation. Ready to say yes to God's urgings in our life and community, we are always listening for the still speaking God.

We are a congregation that cares deeply about justice and service. As a denomination we were at the forefront of the civil rights movement and supported the farm workers in the 70's. Aware of God's extravagant welcome we welcome everyone. As an Open and Affirming congregation we extend God's extravagant welcome to everyone, regardless of race, color, creed or sexual orientation. When you come here you will see the ways that we live as an Open and Affirming congregation.

We believe that Christ is alive in our gathering. As a matter of fact you will notice when you read our Vision and Mission Statement that Christ is precisely in the middle of the statement, word 22 in a 44 word statement. I hope you will visit with us soon.

4. "God is Still Speaking" is an initiative of the United Church of Christ. Describe your congregation's participation in the Still Speaking Initiative

The God is Still Speaking initiative has played an important part in the ongoing renewal of our church. We appreciate how God's extravagant welcome, featured so strongly in the initiative, has reached deeply into our congregational life. This primary value resonates with folk's desire for a spiritual home, a place where they will be met with a radical acceptance, where they will be welcomed to God's table. When we say, "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here," we mean it...and we are relieved. As a truly welcoming, open and affirming congregation we have opened our hearts to our sister congregation, First Samoan Congregational Christian UCC and to the people of our neighborhood. We hope that our neighborhood church will be a welcoming center of community for all, members and friends.

5. Describe some of the **Core Values** of the congregation. A core value is absolutely essential to the life of the congregation. Without **Core Values** the congregation would compromise its reason for being.

- 1) **Worship and Community:** In worship, this community of God’s people comes together and is held in the grace of God. Ours is a common journey. Laughing and crying, singing and praying, we engage in the “liturgical” life, that is, in the work of the people of God. As a community, our lives become worship. This “liturgy” happens when we are apart and when we are together. As a church we are held by the “love that will not let us go” no matter who we are with or what we are doing. We are bound one heart, one soul. We are one people, one body. Our worship of God in all things is at the heart of our community.
 - 2) **Prayer:** We listen for the Still Speaking God, opening our hearts, seeking presence and guidance. Experiencing God’s openness and welcome in prayer calls us to do the same...
 - 3) **Inclusiveness, Openness and Hospitality:** Christ welcomes all to the table, so do we.
 - 4) **Discipleship:** Moving towards discipleship, we experience God’s love and compassion through and through. As we become disciples we are radically transformed where we can finally say with Paul, “it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” As disciples we move into the world...
 - 5) **Evangelism:** Simply, this life that we have come to know in Christ is something we want to share with everyone. So, we reach out telling the good news, and we reach out in love as we are moved to...
 - 6) **Justice and Service** to all. The love that we experience in worship and community is for others. The love that we experience in Christ calls us to serve and to advocate for justice in a war-ravaged, broken world. We seek justice in our private lives, in our homes and family, in our immediate communities and the world.
6. State the vision of the congregation. How is it reflective of the **Core Values**?

Our Vision is summed up in statement, “Making God’s Love Visible.” Our Mission statement, as follows, reflects the Core Values listed:

Warm and welcoming
dynamic and diverse,
We come together with open arms...
to renew our spirits
challenge our minds
and to celebrate Christ in our midst.
Excited and enlivened by the Holy Spirit,
we are transformed.
Reaching out, we become
what our hearts can see.

Hospitality
Openness and Inclusivity
Community and Worship
Training for **Discipleship**
Training for **Discipleship**
Community and Worship
Prayer, Community and Worship
Discipleship
Justice and Service, Evangelism
Growth in **Discipleship and Community**

Our Vision and Mission Statement captures well our **Core Values**, the deep identity that we experience as the body of Christ and the transforming love of Christ that moves us out into the world in service, justice advocacy and in the effort to share what we know and experience with others.

7. Describe how the congregation lives out its vision through its ministry and mission. (Be specific.)

In the spring of 2005 we crafted our Vision and Mission statement. This is our vision and the standard by which we measure our life in Christian Community.

Worship

Worship is central to who we are; it is the work of the people of God, the space to which we return week after week. We have begun to look at our worship service as a spiritual discipline, a place of dialogue, where we engage one another as we seek the presence of the Holy in our togetherness.

Worship has seen great innovation in the last two years. Though we still follow the standard mainline protestant service – invocation, call to worship, prayer, children’s time, etc. . . . , we have found ways to relax our worship and make it more intimate. Our pastor works to make the Word relevant to each of us as we lead our daily lives in Santa Rosa and environs. He also encourages us towards a spirituality that actively engages the issues of the day. The sermon is no longer delivered from a far off pulpit, it is spoken from the floor. When he is finished speaking, David often asks if people have comments or questions --- and we respond openly. We enjoy a wonderful music program for a church our size, incorporating about 20 percent of our membership! Our worship services have grown to overflowing and we have reached the maximum for our sanctuary, necessitating starting a second service in the fall. The new service will be even more informal, borrowing from the methods and philosophy of the “emerging church” movement. We are excited to learn what will emerge for us here on the corner of Humboldt and Silva in Santa Rosa!

Community

Community is important to us here at First Congregational UCC Santa Rosa. As we have grown it has been necessary to “tend” to our sense of community and our genuine affection for one another. New members need to be incorporated and the church must retain the sense of community that is our hallmark. To these ends, the Church Council focused on Community in 2005 – 2006. An important program, Circles, was inaugurated in the Spring of 2006. Circles is an activity where people are assigned to “circles,” or groups, that meet once a month over a 4 month period. Each month each Circle does something different. The first month was a meet your “Circle” gathering at the church. The second month each group shared a meal. On the third month, the group engaged in a “mission” project on behalf of the church and on the fourth month they “played” together. The program was a great success with about 80 people happily taking part.

Next year, there are plans for starting a *Called to Care* lay care-giving program in the church with the hope of strengthening our community. A prayer group meets weekly to pray for individuals, members and friends in need of prayer.

In the last two years, as we have sought to broaden and deepen our community, we have been intentional about fostering relationships with the First Samoan Congregational Christian United Church of Christ. The Samoan congregation worships with us once a month on communion Sunday. These services are an amalgam of Samoan and European style. We enjoy singing hymns in English and Samoan and hearing the scripture read in English and Samoan. Just last spring we began to hold a joint Sunday School staffed by teachers from both congregations. Over the next years, we look forward to an ever-closer relationship with our Samoan sisters and brothers. Our deepening relationship with this congregation has taught us a great deal about multicultural living and of God’s extravagant welcome.

God’s extravagant welcome has touched us in many different ways, two of which are particularly meaningful to us. First, we have a number of consumers of mental health services who worship with us on a Sunday morning. These folks have taught us a great deal about diversity, challenging us to be “open and affirming” in ways that we had not imagined when we voted in 1995 to become Open and Affirming. These members have richly blessed our church and we have grown a great deal by their presence with us. In the last two years we have also begun to foster relationships with folks in the Santa Rosa Junior College Neighborhood. Two years ago, we let it be known that we are interested in being “good neighbors.” Years ago, we used to have members in the neighborhood. Now that is much less the case, with many of our folks coming from further away. Last year, we had two neighborhood picnics that were designed to simply be our extravagant welcome to our neighbors – no strings attached. In addition, we have joined with our neighbors in developing “placemaking” projects designed to foster a sense of community in the Junior College Neighborhood. Our current “placemaking project involves the local community and congregation constructing a cob bench that will be placed on church grounds. This will provide a place in the neighborhood where all can sit and come together.

Discipleship, Justice and Service

Adult Study is important to our development of discipleship here. In the hour before worship, we currently have a book study format regularly attended by 10 to 25 people. Over the last years, we have studied, among others, *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelley, *God's Politics* by Jim Wallis, *The World's Religions* and *The Soul of Christianity* by Huston Smith, *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg, *Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships* by John Welwood, and *Gilead* by Marilyn Williamson. We read the books not only for their content but also as a means for reflection as we look for transformation in our lives. On Wednesday mornings, there is a very successful Bible study, attended by 10 to 15 people, where we study the text that comes to us in the Bible as well as the "living human document" that is our life. All adult study aims for an opening and a Holy Spirit transformation of life.

Our Outreach Board has been very active as it has sought to develop and activate the congregation through what we are calling ministry teams. Following the work of Easum and Bandy, this is an effort to decentralize the mission of the church and energize the congregation for ministry. As we work to develop these teams, we can point to approximately five groups functioning as ministry teams. The lofty goal of this program is 100% participation by the members of the congregation in one team or the other over the year. Thus, we build disciples, creating opportunities for expressing Love and Justice in the world.

First Congregational UCC of Santa Rosa has a history of people being involved in the Conference and National Settings of the church. Currently, Lizann Bassham, a 4-way covenant minister of our congregation, is writing a study guide for the UCC's new film, *Call Me Malcolm*. In the past, she has written curriculum for *Our Whole Lives* and other curriculum for the United Church. Meredith Jackson, a young adult who grew up in our congregation is currently the California intern for *Our Faith, Our Vote*. First Congregational UCC is proud to participate in the United Church of Christ in this way.

First Congregational UCC has historically been supportive of the UCC's OCWM and is a 5 for 5 congregation. UCC Identity has been important to our church, especially in the last two years as a participant in the Still Speaking campaign. We are an ONA Church, now for 11 years. We have been active in Sonoma County Habitat and have been active in helping the homeless in Santa Rosa.

In the Fall of 2006, a new discipleship opportunity will begin. Members of the congregation, clergy (we have a large number of clergy, retired, 3-way and 4-way covenant) and lay, who have a desire to deepen their commitment will be invited to commit up to 30 hours a month on a particular call to ministry. They will meet with David monthly to speak about their faith and ministry. There will also be quarterly meetings of these "servant leaders" for mutual encouragement and support.

Evangelism

First Congregational UCC is very interested in welcoming new members into our congregation. People enjoy inviting people to church. We have seen our average worship attendance increase from 87 to 117 in the last two years and we have taken in about 50 new members in that time. The Growth Board is very active in making our visitors feel welcome. A visitor cannot be seated in our sanctuary until she has met at least 3 different people. With the God is Still Speaking Campaign we joined with local Sonoma County UCC churches in sponsoring the UCC Christmas radio ads in our community. We look forward to doing more of this sort of publicity and evangelism. Our second service will help us make room for the new folks we anticipate coming to our church in the next 5 years.

8. The United Church of Christ seeks to be Multi-cultural/Multi-racial, Open and Affirming, Accessible to All, and a Just Peace Church. How do your Core Values relate to the Core Values of

the UCC?

We consider our Core Values to be those of the United Church of Christ. We became Open and Affirming in 1995. We have a close and on-going relationship with The First Samoan Congregational Christian United Church of Christ. As a community, we worship God, embrace all, work for justice and seek ways to make God's love visible to the world.

Section E: Leadership: Pastoral

Pastoral Leadership

Leadership is a critical issue in church development.

1. Share with us a short biography of the pastor that includes educational background and previous experience.

Our pastor, David Parks-Ramage grew up exposed to a wide range of religious belief and practice. He was born on the Pima Indian Reservation in Arizona where his father and mother were doctor and nurse. He sat on the lap of Swami Akilananda of the Vedanta Society at Boston University and was exposed to the faiths of the world at an early age. At 15, he began his own prayer and meditation practice. He went to Centre College of Kentucky and then to the Yale University Divinity School where he studied with Henri Nouwen and Paul Holmer. He graduated from Yale in 1980 with an M. Div and again in 1981 with a S.T.M. degree. While at Yale, he met Christy Ramage. They were married in 1980. They served the United Church of Christ in Pennsylvania for 10 years before moving to Massachusetts, where they both served churches. Their children Becky and Jonathan were born in Pennsylvania. In 1990, David began a 10-year pastorate in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. While David was in Whitinsville, the congregation grew from about 275 members to around 350 members. In 2000, David started the millennia on the staff of the First Congregational Church of Berkeley, California serving as their minister of Parish Life. At Berkeley, David coordinated programming and was the staff person who helped coordinate the church's Justice and Witness ministries. David began his work at First Congregational UCC, Santa Rosa in 2004. A pastor with compassion and vision David has led us into a time of profound renewal.

2. What is the pastor's vision for this congregation? What gifts does he or she have that will contribute to achieving that vision?

In spiritual community, we move from "me" to "we," into an ever-broadening love and compassion for all. The vision that I share with the First Congregational UCC, Santa Rosa, is to "Making God's Love Visible."

At First Congregational UCC, enlivened through intimate encounter with the Holy One, we become disciples, followers of Christ's Way. As followers of Christ's Way of love it is natural for us to reach out, "Making God's Love Visible" in all we do. So, we have people from this church working for the rights of those in the LGBT community; working at FISH, our local ecumenical food pantry; and helping out at the Living Room, a shelter for women and their children. Having discovered the love of God present in our community, we naturally want to share this love with others. This desire to share what we have has led us to invite others to join us as we spread the Good News of God's extravagant love. We are learning to embrace the "E- word."

I have a strong faith in God's extravagant, reconciling love. God is making all things new and at-one with this creative/re-creative love of God, we become one people living God's

realm in our togetherness and mission. The abundant life wants to be known through our efforts. As disciples and evangelists, the abundant life available in God's love is made visible to all.

I have been a pastor in the United Church of Christ for 25 years. I came to the church from an eclectic spiritual background. As a result, I come to the church with what seems to be an always-fresh perspective, often expressed as, "Why not try this?" or "What is God doing here now?" I have a strong trust that God's realm is working itself out in our midst, just waiting to be discovered. I come to my spiritual life with a strong trust, that whatever the circumstance, "All shall be well." I have a confidence in the members and leaders of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Santa Rosa. I have never known such a welcoming, loving, supportive, and willing church. I believe that each person is a beautiful reflection of God's love, to be known, and loved just as they are. In worship, we celebrate not only God, we celebrate one another as God celebrates us, the Beloved. For the good of the church and for the good of our society and world, the Good News must be shared with all.

14. **Leadership: Lay Persons**

Leadership of the lay members of the congregation is also a critical issue in church development. Describe how lay members are encouraged to name, claim, and use their spiritual gifts.

There are many ways in which members of our church name, claim and use their spiritual gifts. We have an active and varied music ministry that is enriched by the vocal and instrumental gifts of approximately 10% of our membership. Our member's musical gifts are shared through traditional, jazz, contemporary and gospel music. In the past two years, our members who are blessed with the gift of visual arts have blossomed and made our worship experiences come alive with their artistry. Each new season in the church year is greeted with Spirit inspired magnificence. Our worship service reflects the gifts of many in our church family. In the fall, we look forward to a second service which will require the efforts of many of our church musicians and artists.

Our congregation has many talented leaders. There are opportunities to serve on various boards, committees, and church ministry teams. With the realization that we all bring various gifts and have varying amounts of time to commit to church life, there are long-term positions and very short assignments. It is our belief that the most effective leadership comes when members are called to serve and do so joyfully. Our church council is comprised of both long time and relatively new members. Everyone has a voice and respect is offered to all. Each year the Council meets in retreat to set concrete goals for the year.

We have leadership that extends beyond our church walls. We have an active outreach board that encourages members to share their talents and interests with the community through ministry teams. We have members who regularly work at the local food bank, while others are involved with the local Habitat for Humanity effort. We have members who serve on conference committees and at the National Setting of the church. When opportunities arise, we celebrate and acknowledge the work of these members and encourage others to consider opening their lives to similar ministries.

One way that we have encouraged members to name, claim and use their gifts is through our Circles program. While the main purpose of Circles is fellowship, it also has become a venue to discover and share gifts as we participate in a mission project. As our Circles groups came together, the stage is set to think about how we want to be known to one

another and how together we would like to express ourselves through a particular mission. Everyone who participated in the Circles Program came to appreciate that part of our Mission Statement which read, “Reaching out, we become what our hearts can see.”

15. What is the vision of the lay members for this New or Renewing Congregation? In what ways are they planning for the future?

The vision for the lay members of this renewing congregation is spelled out in our new Mission Statement – “Reaching Out, We Become What Our Hearts Can See!” We have been moving with intention to build the capacity of those within our church community to:

- love and care for themselves,
- to effectively care for one another
- to enter with compassion into the wider world.

As we become what our hearts can see we join with the entire United Church of Christ making God’s love in Jesus Christ visible to all.

In our effort to know ourselves as loved and blessed, we have been busy in small groups, participating in Bible Studies, and reading books about God’s love and the Christian call to be welcoming of ourselves and others. These include, Thomas Kelley’s *Testament of Devotion*, and John Welwood’s *Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships*.

We’re also building our church community through a unique fellowship group called CIRCLES, which enables us to become aware of others on a much deeper and wider level within our congregation.

We have developed new ministries in just how to greet regulars and guests at the door. We’ve begun placing someone outside the church door to greet all as they enter to worship. Folks are welcomed and included from the first moment they are on our church campus. This ministry of hospitality expresses that we really are “reaching out” to old and new.

The vision of the lay members is a shared vision with the pastor. Our church is a church that has been experiencing the Holy Spirit in our midst. While listening to that Spirit, we also embrace process and communication. We attempt to include all voices and all perspectives as we move ahead with our vision. We hold meetings; we value input, we communicate via eletters; we maintain a website as well as the more traditional newsletters and bulletins. We know we can only truly move ahead, if together we move with intention, guided by the Holy Spirit.

16. What ongoing educational and spiritual training or opportunities are provided for lay members?

See above in our references to: Adult Classes, Spiritual Sharing and Bible Study opportunities, Sunday Worship. Book Study groups, etc....

17. How are lay members being equipped for their ministries?

We believe that the experience of God’s love in community only makes sense when it equips the saints for ministry. As we provide a strong foundation of love and caring for our members, as we connect with one another and God in a profound and loving way, we also provide opportunities for everyone to explore their gifts and talents. Therefore, educational and service opportunities abound. Our Circles program has a service component; ministry teams provide opportunities to serve various ministries around town and in the world. We encourage people to explore their lives and open to the urgings of the

Holy Spirit. Also, we are alert. At times, it seems like God just brings the right person forward at the right time to handle a particular ministry. We encourage our members and friends to “just say YES” to those yearnings that can come from deep within.

We do have traditional ways that lay participation is supported, through our boards and committees and education opportunities. When new members begin serving, we include them meaningfully from the beginning. Longtime members are not in control – we strive to include all in the decision making bodies of the church. We challenge ourselves to remain open and to believe that God isn’t just speaking during worship, but that God is speaking at council and board meetings, in member’s homes, at Camps, at picnics, and at potlucks. This openness to Spirit seems to bring us just what we need, when we need it.

Section F Demographic Profile of the Setting

1. Please attach a copy of recent demographics to this proposal. Census data demographics are available through:

Attached please find the U.S. Census data for zip code 95404, our immediate area.

Also, you will find the Percept First View 2006 report for zip code 95404

In addition, we draw from zip codes 95401, 95403, 95405, 95409, 95472, 95492, and 94928.

2. Was a feasibility study performed before the formation of the new congregation? If so, please describe.

No feasibility study has been performed as this is an established congregation.

1. Describe how the demographics support the Core Values, Vision, Mission and Ministry of the congregation.

In 2006, 126,000 people reside in the zip codes areas upon which we draw. Of those, 27% are between the ages of 25 and 45, the so-called Millennial Generation. This percentage of millennials supports the development of a second church service which expresss the richness of our Christian tradition, in a less formal and more contemporary style. Our hope is to attract younger people with younger families. This new service will begin in the Fall of 2006.

In addition, another zip code from which we draw has two retirement communities within it. We have a large number of folks who are between 65 and 80. Because of this, the established service will continue to have a more formal feel and we will continue our evangelism efforts as we hope to appeal to members of this age group.

We live in an area of the country where the majority of people has no religious affiliation. Our immediate area is one where people are relatively affluent and well-educated. For these reasons, we believe that we are ideally situated to speak to the un-churched, the not-yet-churched and the de-churched. As an Open and Affirming Congregation, as a group of God’s people who are sensitive to the on-going revelation of the Still Speaking God and the transformative power of Spirit and community in life, we offer a perspective which:

- is respectful of doubt and the struggle of faith
- respectful and open to people of other faiths and cultures
- honors the conscience and belief structure of each human being
- strongly supports justice and mission activities at home and around the world.
- affirms the power of community in our human lives

We offer an alternative to the predominant cultural characterization of Christians as narrow, judgemental and rigid in outlook. We believe that we are ideally situated to grow in the coming years within this demographic.

Section G. Other Churches In The Profile Setting

1. What other churches are in the targeted area? Please attach additional sheet if necessary. List denomination, membership, and attendance if able. Include other UCC congregations in the targeted area.

In Santa Rosa, a town of 160,000 people, there are many churches. The overall theological climate within the town is conservative. We share our niche with a few other progressive churches in the area: Christ United Methodist, and Church of the Incarnation, Episcopal. There are also Unitarian and Church of Religious Science churches in town. That's Santa Rosa.

In Sonoma County there are a number of UCC churches: (2004 Yearbook)

Congregation	Membership	Worship	Distance from Santa Rosa
First Samoan Congregational United Church of Christ – Santa Rosa	97 members	40	We share a building with the Samoans
Kenwood Community Church	69 members		8 miles
Sebastopol Community Church	378 members	180	10 miles
Petaluma United Church of Christ	137 members	77	16 miles
First Congregational Church, Sonoma	174 members	100	17 miles
United Church of Cloverdale	166 members	64	30 miles
Guerneville Community UCC	36 members	40	17 miles

Since we share a marketing area with the above UCC churches, it is our hope to team with them in any future marketing plans.

2. If other UCC congregations are present, describe the need for this new congregation.

The time is now for this renewing congregation! We are lively and we are growing. Our membership is up by 50 over the last two years and our attendance is up by 30. We are starting a new service designed to reach more folks. The added resources that a grant will provide will enable us to enhance our ministries so that we can support our growth as a congregation.

H. Statistics. Please describe your congregation's ministries using actual numbers for last year, this year and projected for two additional years.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number People in Membership	146	174	204	220	240
Number of People as Visitors (including multiple visits)	Average per month 12	Average per month 14	Average per month 20	Average per month 30	Average per month 30
Worship Attendance Numbers	87	90	117	140	140
Adult	70	78	103	122	122
Youth	9	7	8	10	10
Children	8	5	6	8	8
Number of Persons in Small Groups	35	55	100	110	120
We have a Faith/Promise Campaign that makes it impossible to know the Number People Who Tithe	Best Guess 4	Best Guess 4	Best Guess 3	4	5
Number People Who Give as Regular Financial Contributors (other than tithe)	80	100	104	110	115
Persons in Educational Programming:	29	40	62	70	80
Adults	10	24	30	35	40
Children	9	6	20	20	25
Youth	10	10	12	15	15

2. Please describe your evangelism plan to attract new members, bring them into the life of the congregation, and engage them in mission and ministry. Include any advertising strategies or programmatic initiatives. How will you attract the unchurched and the dechurched?

From the film, *Field of Dreams*, we've picked up a saying, "Build it and they will come." This is what we have been doing for the past two years -- building a church that will attract others. First Congregational UCC is a fantastic congregation, she is active and alive with a spiritual integrity and a lively concern for justice and mercy. And people have come: In little over two years, we have grown about 20% in membership and 30% in worship attendance.

So, we have been building. What have we done? We have:

- Enlivened our worship service
- Through a series of meetings of the congregation and committees we have prepared a Vision and Mission statement for our congregation
- Upgraded our Adult Study hour on Sunday morning and started a Wednesday morning Bible Study and Faith Sharing time.
- Began our Circles program designed to foster community in our church
- Became enthusiastic supporters and beneficiaries of the God is Still Speaking Initiative
- Fostered a working relationship with our Samoan brothers and sisters, joining with them in morning worship and in outreach to the Santa Rosa Junior College Neighborhood
- In cooperation with the Samoan congregation sponsored a multi-cultural Sunday School.
- Begun to develop "ministry teams" for Outreach and mission

In the next year, as we strive to "make God's love visible" in our community and through our Outreach and Mission, we will continue our "building project." We plan to:

- Start a new worship service designed to reach those not yet here
- Begin a "discipleship group." Here, folks who desire to deepen their commitment to their church through a particular ministry will find spiritual support and sustenance
- Create a wellness program for our members and friends
- Continue to foster our relationship with our neighbors
- Begin our "Called to Care" ministry group
- Initiate an intentional Evangelism Plan

If we receive the grant we will use part the money to hire a "Associate Pastor" to further strengthen the ministry of the church in its service to children and youth.

Our "building activities" have been essential to what we have accomplished in the last two years. First Congregational UCC has become an "open space" for spiritual discovery on the individual and communal levels. We have provided a space for people to come and ask questions of life, wrestle with life's struggle and ambiguity, and find faith. We are constantly amazed at the ways Spirit has blessed us over the last two years. While we have grown, we believe that we have established a strong foundation for further growth. *Now is the time* to move to the next level.

Becoming Visible

We consider ourselves the best kept secret in Sonoma County – a church that is open, affirming and welcoming to all, that encourages progressive thinking, and that is spiritually vital and alive.

When the God is Still Speaking Initiative began we were on-board, hoping to capitalize from the National Setting's activity on our behalf. As the networks declined to run the UCC ads, we held a media event at our church protesting the networks' decision. For us, this was an Evangelism decision. We wanted to let people know that we were "that church." We are on the constant lookout for such free publicity. We believe that as people come to know we are here, they will come. As we become more visible, we will be in a better place to make God's love visible in Santa Rosa.

Active Evangelism

Like the Whos in *Horton Hears a Who*, we want to be more active in letting people know we are here. We want to find all the ways possible for us to shout out, "We are here! We are here!" We want Santa Rosa and environs to know that they have a choice in picking a spiritual community. For this, we need resources: training and help in running an effective evangelism and advertising campaign and money to do it. We would like to be a congregation unashamed of the E word. We have something to share, something that is good for the world. We would like to get on with it. In 2007 we will:

1. Initiate an Invitational Evangelism training encouraging our members and friends to invite their friends to church.
2. Explore free advertising through cable access, media events, etc...
3. Look at ways to maximize a paid advertising campaign, looking to LCM for training and guidance. We would like to explore sharing this campaign with our Sonoma County UCC churches.
4. Continue to foster our relationship with our immediate neighbors, opening our church to their use and exploration

3. What is your budget for evangelism?

Currently, we have a small budget for Evangelism, not even 1000.00 (evangelism plus advertising). With the grant we would be in the position to increase our Evangelism budget. Without the grant, the minister and moderator have access to some money that could be drawn at the rate of 2000.00 each year for up to 3 years.

L. Covenant Keeper: Our Churches Wider Mission

1. Our Churches Wider Mission giving (OCWM) is one important part of our covenantal relationships. A **Covenant Keeper** congregation is a congregation which gives 10% to OCWM. Describe your plan to reach the goal of giving 10% to OCWM.

Our "UCC Share" giving to the conference and the national setting is currently at 9.64% of our Operational Budget. Our plan is to keep these numbers at Covenant Keeper levels.

We have a "split envelope," where those who give to the church have the opportunity to make a Faith/Promise to "outreach," and a faith promise that would go towards the General Budget. To maintain our UCC Share giving we will:

- Appeal to the congregation for an increase in Outreach giving.
- work with the council to make up the difference so as to reach the 10% goal over 3 years – 1% per year.

2. Describe financial plans beyond the Leadership Funding for funding period.

If through our new worship service and attendant evangelism efforts we grow by 20 to 30 new members per year, we anticipate an increased income of 10000 to 20000 per year. This will allow us to increase our giving to UCC Share, and pay a fair wage to a part-time (moving to full time) pastor to help with the ministry needs of our growing, vital church. We see the subsidy beginning at 10000.00, the first year, 15000.00 the second year (hiring Associate Pastor) decreasing to 10000.00 subsequent years for the life of the grant.

For over a decade, our congregation has conducted its Faith/Promise campaign "by letter." Our 2006 –'07 will be a campaign that allows for more face-to-face contact, as we stress the Vision and Mission of our church.

3. Describe the congregation's Covenantal and Partnership relationship with your Association, Conference and Wider Church.

We are a member church of the Golden Gate Association, Northern California Nevada Conference United Church of Christ. We have a number of people serving the church on the Association, Conference and National Setting levels. Our pastor is a member of the Board of Directors of the Golden Gate Association and a number of our members serve on Conference Committees. Last year, we sent 9 members to the Conference meeting. The Rev. Gayle Madison, ACM for the Golden Gate Association (northern area), is a member of our congregation. We have a strong historical tie to the Conference. In 2001, our OCWM giving was at a level of 15% per capita. Though that has reduced in the last 6 years, we are exploring ways to maintain our level of giving to what our Conference calls "UCC Share (OCWM plus conference dues)," 10% of our operational budget. We are a 5 for 5 church. Usually we have a member or two at General Synod and our Youth Group has regularly participated in the National Youth Event. We are Open and Affirming since 1995 and, quite happily, we are a God is Still Speaking Church. We are happily and proudly a member church of the United Church of Christ.

4. Are you producing annual reports?
Yes
5. Do you have regular financial statements?
Yes
6. Do you need help in these areas?
No

M. Covenantal Partner Support

1. Describe the ongoing support of the Conference in addition to New and Renewing Congregational Funding.

David Bergman-Hill has been working with us on this project. We have already begun to network with churches in the Conference on ideas, plans, etc.... I hope that this will continue. The Conference will subsidize this proposal to the tune of 5000.00 over 2 years or 10000.00 over 5 years.

2. What ongoing Local Church Ministries support is envisioned?

- a) Prayer: There will be on-going prayer here in Santa Rosa. We ask that our LCM and Conference partners join us in our prayers.
- b) Training: Specifically, we would like training in organizing an evangelism plan that includes uses of the media and advertising.
- c) Resources: We look forward to the subsidies and to the input from Conference, Association and National Setting. This is a collaborative effort.
- d) On-site visitation: Please come at any time. We look forward to working with LCM – **even if we do not receive a grant.**

3. How will evaluation and reporting occur? The Local Support Committee will meet every other month to assess progress and growth and to fine tune planning and implementation. We will invite representatives from the Conference on an occasional basis and keep in good contact with LCM. Yearly reviews to be written and distributed to the Congregation, Conference and LCM.

4. Support Committee:

a) Names of members: Judy Adams, moderator of the Congregation; Coral Cogbill, treasurer of the congregation,; Bill Gibson; Judy Gibson; Debbie Studebaker, Mark Adams, David Parks-Ramage, pastor;

8. What would be the result of not receiving a Grant for this congregation? This grant would serve to jump-start our growth. We are already active, alive and strong. We are solvent financially. We have a positive, growth-oriented attitude. We will begin our new service in October. We will continue to nurture our sense of community. Without the grant we will not be able to make the moves towards growth as quickly as we would like. And, as has been said, **“the time is now.” The time is now** for our congregation. All the right things are in place. The fullness of time is breaking into our community. We want to be able to respond not just as the church in Santa Rosa, but as the whole church in covenant – First Congregational UCC, Golden Gate Association, Northern California Nevada Conference, and The United Church of Christ. At every level we ask, “Where is God speaking?” We know She is speaking here in Santa Rosa. **Now is the time!**

So, we apply for this grant not just for ourselves, but for all our Covenant partners, the whole United Church of Christ. We will be using the LCM grant in collaboration with other churches in our area. As we grow so will the Association, Conference, the UCC. We have something to share, with the entire church, with the world. The grant will help us do this. Will we do this without the extra funding? Of course, as resources allow, but...the time is now!

9. Are there other things you would like us to know about this congregation?

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to apply for resources which will help us to spread the Good News of God’s extravagant welcome to our community.

As we have prepared the materials for this grant it has given us an opportunity to look at ourselves, our Vision and our Mission. We have looked and we like what we see. There is great potential in our congregation, waiting to be tapped. It has been a gift for us to see the challenge ahead of us and to discover the courage that will allow us to live our Vision: “Making God’s Love Visible!”