

VISION 2025: Setting a direction for Gower St. United Church for 2016 to 2025

Final version - Approved by the BoD on May 12 and then by the Congregation on June 12th, 2016

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Note: *This document is supplemented by a set of Appendices which is available as a separate document that is posted on the Gower web site and can also be obtained upon request from the Church office in hard copy or as an electronic document.*

Executive Summary

Vision 2025 is a new long-term planning guide for Gower Street United Church for the ten-year period 2016 to 2025 inclusive. Gower's journey began in 1815 and spans 20 decades. The purpose of the plan is to set the direction for the next segment of our journey as a church and as a faith community. The creation of *Vision 2025* was mandated by the Board and responsibility for its development assigned to a Visioning Committee. *Vision 2025* is the final element of the agenda for the "Gower 200" year of celebration.

The content of *Vision 2025* emerges from extensive input provided by members of the Gower community and by representatives of other downtown churches and of social services agencies in the City in the fall of 2015. The Visioning Committee also gained important context from a number of previous planning documents, surveys, and reports.

Vision 2025 is an ambitious plan. However, it does not present a radical change in direction, but it is progressive, and calls upon us to be proactive in clearly outlining our goals. It uncovered a lot of optimism for Gower but also a clear set of challenges to address in fulfilling the desires of the extended Gower community and community partners.

The central component of *Vision 2025* is the identification of four priority focus areas and some explicit supporting objectives for each area. The recommended focus areas are:

- #1: *Gower as people – participation, engagement, and leadership*
- #2: *Gower as a downtown United Church*
- #3: *Gower and sustainability*
- #4: *Gower and society*

The recommended objectives that accompany each focus area can be found in the body of the report. To pave the way for these focus areas, a set of existing strengths and a set of current challenges are first set out in separate sections. *Vision 2025* also contains a section that addresses year-by-year implementation planning, periodic updates of *Vision 2025* itself, regular communications on progress towards the goals of *Vision 2025*, and the provision of appropriate resources to support implementation.

Several supplementary recommendations are made in *Vision 2025*. One is to create a new overarching statement of Vision, Mission, and Core Values. Another is to develop a comprehensive, integrated communications strategy and operationalize it.

Finally, Gower has done, is doing, and will continue to do a wide range of programming and activities, some foundational and some discretionary. *Vision 2025* does not intend to provide a planning guide for all aspects of the life and work of Gower. It is assumed that Gower will maintain, and possibly enhance, foundational elements (e.g., worship) and areas of strength, and undertake appropriate planning in this regard, being open to overlap and synergies with *Vision 2025*.

From the many background documents reviewed and the broad spectrum of input received in the consultation phase, the Visioning Committee distilled the following working statement about Gower. The Visioning Committee found it inspirational and have chosen it to conclude this Executive Summary in the hope that you will also find some inspiration in it too and as a positive segue to the main report.

“Gower Street United Church is founded in worship and music and family and camaraderie, with an increasing desire to support the community in which we live. Gower continues to be an evolving church willing to adapt to the changing needs and wants of society, while always grounded in the traditions and beliefs of Christianity. Gower is diverse in ways to be involved. Gower includes people whom you may never see at a Sunday service but who are dedicated participants in a Gower program or activity. Gower is those who read and listen to the scriptures. Gower is the people who want to make a difference. Gower is those who used to help, currently help, and someday will help others. For many, Gower is tradition but also progressive. The Gower community is like family. In the future Gower will be even more focused on doing what is right, every day of the week, for our congregation and for our community.”

I. Background

The creation of a new longer-term vision for Gower St. United Church is the final element of the agenda for the Gower 200 year of celebration. The tag line of Gower 200 was “Faith, Spirit and Vision”, and the new plan presents a renewed vision to guide us from 2016 to 2025, the 100th anniversary of The United Church of Canada. Aptly, its short title is *Vision 2025*.

Vision 2025 explicitly makes connections with previous strategic plans created in 1990 and in 2000 and with some earlier surveys and reports. These documents have much to offer in linking our past journey beginning in 1815 and spanning 20 decades, to our continuing journey and a renewed vision for our 21st decade. The purpose of the plan is to set the direction for the next segment of our journey as a church and as a faith community from our current way-station in 2015 to another way-station in 2025. Reflecting on our 20th decade (2006 to 2015 inclusive) reveals that significant change occurred, some examples being the adoption of same-sex marriage, the start of the Gower Street lunch program, major renovations and repair of the building envelope, and restoration of the organ. Gower has also experienced changes in ministerial staffing including the departure of Rev. Kate Crawford, the retirement of Rev. Marion Davis, and the hiring of Rev. Guy Matthews and then Mr. Keith Wiseman. We should expect no less change, perhaps more, for the next decade.

Given this temporal context, *Vision 2025* does not present a radical change in direction, but it is progressive, and it calls upon us to be proactive in addressing some major challenges that have been re-identified in the input phase and have gathered momentum over the past 25 years. While addressing challenges, *Vision 2025* also calls upon us to take advantage of some emerging opportunities and to fulfill some unmet needs in the Gower community and the broader community in which Gower exists.

Throughout the input phase the Committee heard concerns based on perceived non-implementation of past plans and on the possibility of the new plan sitting on the shelf. *Vision 2025* contains some explicit recommendations on implementation directed to the Board and the Board Executive. Under our Constitution the Executive serves as the planning body of the church.

Vision 2025 is a high level plan. At its core are some recommended priority focus areas, and within each focus area there are some recommended specific longer-term objectives. But it does not attempt to lay out details of precisely how to accomplish the goals in each area. That is, it is not an operational plan. An operational plan and tracking progress is the ongoing responsibility of the Board.

From the many background documents reviewed and the broad spectrum of input received in the consultation phase, the Visioning Committee distilled the following working statement about Gower. It contains elements of a formal statement of vision, mission, and core values.

“Gower Street United Church is founded in worship and music and family and camaraderie, with an increasing desire to support the community in which we live. Gower continues to be an evolving church willing to adapt to the changing needs and wants of society, while always grounded in the traditions and beliefs of Christianity. Gower is diverse in ways to be involved. Gower includes people whom you may never see at a Sunday service but who are dedicated participants in a Gower program or activity. Gower is those who read and listen to the scriptures. Gower is the people who want to make a difference. Gower is those who used to help, currently help, and someday will help others. For many, Gower is tradition but also progressive. The Gower community is like family. In the future Gower will be even more focused on doing what is right, every day of the week, for our congregation and for our community.”

The Committee was not tasked with developing a formal statement of Vision, Mission and Core Values. Gower’s formal Mission statement is now 15 years old and the general level of awareness of this statement appears to be quite low. In gathering input to guide the development of Vision 2025, the Visioning Committee found a fairly widespread lack of a shared understanding of the overarching vision, mission and core values for Gower. Perhaps there is such a shared understanding and the majority are not able to articulate it. The proxy statement provided above was derived from piecewise input, not from a systematic approach to developing a formal statement, but is a starting point. Thus the **first recommendation** of *Vision 2025* is:

That Gower create a new statement containing three elements: Vision, Mission and Core Values.

II. Mandate

In September 2014 the Chair of the Board Lorne LeDrew asked Vice-Chair David Wardlaw to lead the development of a longer-term vision/strategic plan for Gower Street United Church. The Vice-Chair then prepared a draft mandate document outlining the proposed scope and type of the plan and a process for creating it. This draft mandate was reviewed by the Board Chair, the Minister, and the Board Executive; the final version was subsequently approved by the Board Executive. This mandate document is provided in Appendix 1 (in separate set of Appendices).

Included in the mandate was a recommendation that a small working group be assembled to lead and facilitate the planning process and to draft a report containing a proposed longer-term vision/strategic plan for the church. This working group was subsequently formed by the Vice-Chair and, during the planning process, came to be known as the Visioning Committee. Members are Lloyd Gill, Florence Sanna, Mark Peters, Gail Wideman, and David Wardlaw (Chair).

The process outlined in the mandate document consisted of four phases:

1. Preparatory Phase (background documents, planning for phase 2)
2. Consultative (Input) Phase (input from Gower congregation and local community)
3. Formative Phase (synthesize input from phases 1 and 2, prepare 1st draft)
4. Final Phase (circulation of report, revisions, adoption of report)

The final report was mandated to be a statement of high level, longer-term priorities/objectives with a time horizon of 5 – 10 years (10 years was eventually chosen). It is not intended to be an operational plan but a high-level framework to focus the mission of Gower, to frame decision-making on activities, projects, initiatives, and associated budget requirements. It will be a guiding document to be used over the course of time and at various levels (Board, committees, groups, congregation, ministerial staff).

III. Process & Methodology for Development of Vision 2025

A. Background Phase: Previous Plans and Surveys

In the background phase, the Visioning Committee reviewed the following Gower documents:

- Long-term plan created in 1990 (called Plan 2000)
- Report of the Steering Committee, 1994
- Long-term plan created in 2000 (called Report of Congregational Review Committee)
- JNAC Report, 2004
- The Year of Conversation on Same-Sex Marriage: The Experience of Gower St. United Church, 2007-08
- Survey Report, 2008
- JNAC Report, 2010
- Speak-up Survey, 2012

In addition the Committee solicited information on long-term plans, JNAC reports, surveys, and/or planning activities from selected other United Churches in NL and other provinces and from a smaller number of churches from other mainstream denominations. The following were obtained and reviewed by the Visioning Committee:

- Cowan Heights United Church Three-Year Strategic Plan (2010-13)
- Park Royal United Church (Charlottetown) Visioning Day Report (2013)
- Rockingham United Church (Halifax) Long-Range Plan (2014)
- St. Mark's United Church (St. John, NB) Summary of Planning Process (2012, 2013) and Report (2014)
- St. Peter's United Church (Sudbury) JNAC Report (2011) and Report on Moving the JNAC Forward (2012)

Finally the Committee reviewed the following United Church of Canada document:

- Report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group of The United Church of Canada, March 2015

B. Consultation Phase: Input from the Gower congregation and broader community

In the consultation or input phase, the Committee organized the following sessions and surveys:

- An assessment of extent of implementation of the Congregational Review Report of 2000, exercise undertaken by the Board in May 2015
- An EDGE Intake Interview, June 2015: The Visioning Committee, supplemented with 3 Committee Chairs, took part in a structured two-hour interview conducted by a facilitator provided by the EDGE service of The United Church of Canada (EDGE is planning resource service for congregations provided by the national church office)
- Bulletin insert questionnaire, Aug-Sept. 2015
- An internal focus group session open to the congregation
- Three focus group sessions with representatives of Gower committees, groups, clubs, and organizations, Sept.-Nov. 2015
- An external focus group session with representatives of other downtown churches, non-profit social service organizations, the City and the provincial government, Nov. 2015
- Identity Mission and Needs Assessment Survey of the congregation (survey instrument provided by EDGE), Nov. 2015

More details on the process and methodology employed by the Committee for the Background Phase (Subsection A of this section) and Consultation Phase (Subsection B of this section) are provided in Appendix 2 (in separate set of Appendices).

IV. Existing Strengths

Eight strengths are described below. These arise from synthesis of the documents reviewed in the Background Phase (see Appendices 3 and 4 for summaries (in separate set of Appendices) and input received in the Consultation Phase (see Appendices 5-7 for a summaries (in separate set of Appendices)). Before proceeding, a few words are in order about how the authors of the report distinguished areas of existing strength from proposed focus priority areas for this plan. The authors consider 'strengths' to be assets that are generally embedded in the culture, practices and psyche of Gower. We should maintain and try to enhance our areas of strength. In this long-term plan these areas of strength are not identified as the priority focus areas. If an organization has a strong track record of being outstanding in a particular area, then that area generally does not need to receive priority attention. This does not preclude improvements and enhancements in an area of strength. Furthermore, areas of strength naturally have some alignment with, and do provide some of the framework for making progress on, the proposed priority focus areas.

1. Prominent and Influential Downtown Church

- Represents 200 years of tradition and achievement
- Has assumed some leadership roles within The United Church of Canada (District, Conference, National)
- A "flagship" church within The United Church of Canada, one that is known nationally
- Has assumed some leadership roles in the broader community of churches in St. John's and environs
- Highly regarded and trusted by organizations, social service providers, businesses and citizens in St. John's and environs
- Known in the United Church context and in the community for its inclusivity
- Central location at a hub point in downtown core
- A variety of types of facilities under one roof, a number of which are not otherwise available or are of limited availability in the downtown core
- A number of thriving clubs and groups
- A "music" church in terms of programming, training, events, high quality concert venue
- The 1896 part of the building is a heritage structure
- Elegant, aesthetic, large sanctuary
- Part of a set of downtown United Churches which are working together to support their congregations and the community and to ensure sustainability.

2. Worship

- Progressively traditional
- Includes and is enhanced by strong music program
- Is regularly accessible beyond in-person participation via radio
- Routinely includes strong and appealing preaching

3. Pastoral Care

- One of the priorities of ministerial team
- A dedicated ministerial staff person assigned to pastoral care with assistance of numerous volunteers (extensive operation)

- Men's Club and UCW routinely undertake some pastoral care

4. Community Outreach

- Part of the Gower tradition and a core value
- Involvement in a number of outreach activities over the decades; some of these activities have ceased or been transferred to other agencies, some completed, while others are ongoing and some are episodic.
- Various levels of involvement: primary; secondary; partnership; source of volunteers; representation on boards of non-profit social services agencies and pan-organization committees
- Some selected examples are: Gower Street lunch program, Gower Community Band, regularly conducting worship services at four care homes/long-term care facilities

5. Inclusivity

- Has a reputation in this regard
- One of the first Affirming Congregations and early adopter of same-sex marriage
- Church building is physically accessible
- Inclusivity is consistent element of worship services
- Gower Community Band (GCB) is a large organization, affiliated with and sponsored by Gower, that is open to the entire community

6. Social activities and network

- Highly valued aspect of involvement in/belonging to Gower
- Includes: post-church coffee, special events, meals in the church hall, men's club, UCW, seniors group, choir, book club, GCB (this list is likely incomplete).

7. People

- The Gower community is a capable group collectively having an advanced level of education, professional qualifications, work experience (including managerial or leadership experience), and United Church experience.
- Within the Gower demographic there is large cohort of retired and semi-retired people with strong affinity to Gower and who are in a position to give significant amounts of time to Gower activities (and many do so).
- Significant number of long-time members and adherents with decades of lived experience in a church setting and at Gower and who have a collective wisdom for Gower to draw on.
- The Gower community is diverse in the sense that it includes those who don't usually attend church on Sunday but support and attend the various internal and outreach activities involving music, luncheons and dinners, clubs, groups, visitation, and community programs.
- The broader Gower community also includes: those who regularly listen to broadcasts of Gower worship services; members of Gower who can no longer attend worship at Gower or participate in Gower activities; "alumni" of Gower who are dispersed throughout the Province, across Canada, and around the world; those in care homes who regularly participate in on-site worship services led by members of the Men's Club, UCW, or the Pastoral Care Committee; and "friends" of Gower who have no direct association with Gower but who have made donations.

- Considering the above two bullet items, the broader Gower community is seen to be significantly larger than the “core” congregation as defined by regular attendance at Sunday worship/Sunday School.

8. Fiscal Resources

- Annual budget stability: balanced budgets or relatively small deficits (as % of total budget) over past decade)
- Relatively large reserve fund
- Able to make major capital investments in building envelope and organ restoration over last decade

V. Current and Continuing Challenges

Four major challenges are described below. Each arises from shifting circumstances and existing barriers, some of which are longstanding. Understanding and addressing these challenges will be necessary for successful implementation of *Vision 2025* and for advancing the overall life and work of Gower. The challenges identified here arise from synthesis of Gower documents reviewed in the Background Phase (see Appendix 4 for a summary (in separate set of Appendices)) and input received in the Consultation Phase (see Appendices 5-7 for a summaries (in separate set of Appendices)). Some of the items listed under each major challenge area turn out to be a re-identification of situations going back 25 years; their reappearance in Vision 2025 likely signals that they have since gathered momentum.

1. The Demographic Challenge

Demographic change is an ongoing reality. All churches exist in an environment of demographic shifts. Throughout its 200 years Gower has faced challenges and benefitted from opportunities arising from demographic change in St. John’s, the Avalon, Newfoundland, and Canada. The present era is no exception. There is a myriad of demographic changes affecting Gower, the downtown United Churches, all downtown churches, The United Church of Canada, all Christian denominations, and organized religion in general. The confluence of a number of factors in the early 2000’s presents a particularly large challenge for Gower as it enters its 21st decade.

- Gower core congregation and the broader Gower community is aging – significant majority over age 55
- Overall size of core congregation, as measured in traditional terms, continues to slowly decline, reflecting and contributing to the decline being experienced in the United Church and in other mainline Christian denominations on a national scale
- Gower child, teen, young adult , and 30-55 cohorts are under-represented relative to society at large; implicit is under-representation of young families
- No indication of a consistent, sustainable up-turn in the relative proportion of these four cohorts
- The cultural, ethnic, and international diversity of the current St. John’s demographic is not reflected in the broader Gower congregation (members, adherents, regular and occasional participants in Gower activities)
- Gower is a “destination” church, as opposed to a neighbourhood church
- In general people have, or have decided to designate, less time for church activities and worship
- Reality/expectation that generations following the baby-boomer generation are/will be less well off, a situation likely to impact negatively the general level of givings to churches.

- An unknown factor at the time of preparing this document is the extent and direction of any change in the demographic of the downtown core over next 10 years, e.g., increased upper middle age and/or seniors population due to new condos/apts., decreased downtown population, "gentrification" of some downtown residential areas leading to a socio-economic shift in the downtown demographic
- Four proximate downtown United Church pastoral charges, each with its own building, all facing most, if not all, of demographic challenges listed above. It is within the realm of possibility that there will be fewer than 4 pastoral charges by 2025. The challenge for all four of these United Churches is to plan and act proactively and in collaboration for a thoughtful, orderly, and respectful transition to sustainable model for the United Church in downtown St. John's.
- The normal resistance to the major change and loss of identity associated with any re-organization of a group of existing pastoral charges, e.g., merger/union of pastoral charges, or closing of one or more pastoral charge combined with creation of a brand new one.

2. The Societal Challenge

The context is that a core value or fundamental attribute of Gower is that it is not an island unto itself, but instead, as Sister Diane Smyth of the Sisters of Mercy Generalate recently said at Sunday worship in January 2016: "Gower is an island of care and compassion" (in the downtown area). Supporting those in need in the community in which Gower is situated emerged as an important part of the Gower fabric in gathering input for *Vision 2025*. This support for the community takes many forms including our own outreach activities, partnership with or providing volunteer resources for social services organizations, or membership on city-wide or pan-organization committees. There are growing pressures and opportunities for faith communities to respond to societal challenges. Challenges include:

- Aging demographic for society as a whole, particularly in NL compared to rest of Canada
- Growing fiscal gap between those with means and those without
- Constraints on, and possible reduction in, level of government social services
- Growing demand on non-profit, non-governmental agencies that provide a range of social services
- Growing demand on foodbanks and some foodbanks having to ration supplies
- Tendency of homeless/destitute/impooverished people to inhabit the downtown area of a city

3. The Physical Challenge (church building)

- High cost of maintaining a heritage structure (~120 yrs. old) as a heritage structure
- Unlikelihood of substantial assistance from any level of government
- High cost (per square foot) of operating the building (heat, power, retrofits, improvements, cleaning)
- Parking (depending on the activity/event)
- Low occupancy rate in terms of daily/weekly use of the combined set of facilities in the building

4. The Communications Challenge

Communications are a central component to the well-being and effective operation of any organization. In the process of developing *Vision 2025*, the Visioning Committee received input that indicated a desire for more and better communications, and an openness to using a broader set of communication tools. In

addition, the Committee itself directly encountered some unanticipated communications barriers.

Challenges include:

- Absence of an overall communications strategy.
- Apparent absence of organizational/operational structure to enable Gower to be consistent, systematic and intentional in this area.
- Based on focus group sessions and the survey, there appears to be ambiguity and lack of a generally shared understanding on what Gower stands for; improved and consistent communications will help rectify this issue (along with other factors including a new Vision, Mission and Core Value statement, and *Vision 2025* itself)
- Members of Gower's extended congregation and community are not routinely kept abreast of the many activities, strategies and initiatives ongoing, which results in lack of awareness of opportunities for participation and is a missed opportunity to build the Gower brand (i.e., reputation).
- Recent/current communications effort is not integrated. Within active areas of communication, some areas are managed through the church office and others by volunteers; active areas are generally well covered. There are other areas where there is no designated person, or there is considerable ambiguity about, who is administratively or organizationally responsible, a situation which hampers effective, timely communications or prevents it altogether.
- Significant gaps in consistent, regular communications with Gower audiences outside the "core" group that regularly attends Sunday worship and/or is actively involved in church committees and groups, and in communications with external audiences.
- Not fully exploiting the full spectrum of communications modalities that have become available, particularly various telecommunication and computer-based modalities that are routinely used and preferred by demographic cohorts whom we aspire to engage.

VI. Priority Focus Areas

Preamble

This is the central section of the report. Here **four (4) priority focus areas are recommended**. Within each **some specific objectives** for the 10-year period spanned by *Vision 2025* **are recommended**. The final set of priority focus areas and associated sets of objectives are left for the Board to confirm, followed by any subsequent final approval process as would be set out by the Board. That is, the door is left open for some fine tuning of the document and/or its recommendations by the Board before proposing a final version.

The Visioning Committee arrived at these four priority focus areas and the associated objectives from a distillation of themes arising in Gower documents reviewed in the Background Phase (see Appendix 4 for a summary (in separate set of Appendices)) and input received in the Consultation Phase (see Appendices 5-7 for summaries (in separate set of Appendices)). Taken together, the objectives listed below, whether modified or adopted as is, provide a well-developed blueprint for making substantive progress in each of the priority focus areas. At the same time it is very important to note that *Vision 2025* does not, nor is its purpose to, provide a strategy for achieving agreed-upon objectives in each focus area. Nor does it suggest how to implement such a strategy, i.e., it is not an operational plan. Instead, an implementation strategy and associated operational plan are properly left to the Board and the Board Executive, the latter serving as the official planning body of the church under the Gower constitution.

It is recognized that there will likely be other one-time and ongoing activities (existing or new) that contribute to one or more of the 4 priority focus areas. That is, the stated sets of objectives for an area are not the sole route to progress in a given area but are expected to provide a significant boost. It is also recognized that new or modified specific goals in any of the four areas may be identified and approved in proposed periodic updates to *Vision 2025* (see Implementation section below).

It is essential to note that there are other areas of strength and areas of excellence, which can and should be continued, possibly being improved or enhanced, some of which are core to the mission of Gower. These should not be abandoned or neglected and still require some level of time, talent and resources. A key feature of *Vision 2025* is that it is not about the status quo but instead about a renewed vision for this church which is framed in a set of priority focus areas.

It is noted that there are some natural crossovers between two (or more) Focus Areas. No explicit comments are made in this regard here but the reader will quickly identify them and they can be taken into account in the implementation process.

Priority Focus Area #1: *Gower as people – participation, engagement, and leadership*

The Gower congregation consists of a large number of people who actively support and regularly participate in the many and varied aspects of the life and work of the church. Ensuring that the existing Gower community remains engaged and that people who are not currently involved in the life and work of Gower are presented with a spectrum of opportunities to be active and engaged is essential to sustaining a vibrant, capable Gower community. A concise and useful descriptor of this proposed focus area is ‘congregational development’ and Objective 1.1 recommends that Gower be intentional about this central aspect of a church by creating a congregational development plan.

Recommended Objectives

- 1.1 Create a comprehensive congregational development plan. The remaining Objectives 1.2 to 1.6 listed below are certainly elements to be included in such a plan but it is anticipated that the plan would identify and include other elements, some of which are already in place and should be continued. In the event that it is decided not to adopt Objective 1.1, then Objectives 1.2 to 1.6 should nevertheless be implemented individually.
- 1.2 Stabilize the total number of people in the broader Gower congregation where the broader congregation is defined as those participating regularly in all types of Gower programs and activities. The list is long and includes: Sunday worship, other forms of worship, Sunday School, music program, Christian education, church governance (Board, Committees), clubs, groups, outreach activities and programs, and “affiliated” activities/organizations (e.g., Gower Community Band, Seniors Group); this list is likely incomplete. A stretch goal is to modestly increase the total number in the broader congregation. The total number approach recognizes and celebrates all forms of Gower participation and allows for the possibility or eventuality that the numbers participating in one given program or activity may decline over time (e.g., attendance at Sunday worship has been declining on average for some time) while numbers in another activity or program may be increasing or be more increasable depending on the activity or program.

- 1.3 Increase the fraction of the broader congregation taking on supporting roles in worship, teaching roles in Christian education, leadership roles in church governance/committees/groups, volunteering in programs/activities affiliated with Gower, volunteering for non-profits. In parallel, also increase the number of members/adherents of Gower who assume volunteer or leadership roles in the greater United Church at the District, Conference, and national levels or at whatever new levels might emerge in an administrative restructuring of The United Church of Canada.
- 1.4 Take full advantage of the Gower demographic, namely the time and talent of members, adherents and participants. The Gower community is a very capable group having above-average level of education, and professional qualifications and experience, including managerial or leadership experience. Of particular note is the seniors cohort which is the largest Gower cohort and the majority of whom are retired and can (and many do) offer the gift of time.
- 1.5 Develop a mechanism to enable Gower to be consistent, systematic and intentional with respect to inviting and welcoming to newcomers, and to engaging members, adherents, and occasional participants.
- 1.6 Engage in consistent, timely, and multi-media dissemination of information about Gower programs/activities/worship to the broader Gower community (Gower alumni, friends of Gower, those in care homes who participate in worship services provided by Gower members, those who listen to worship service broadcasts), and to people, organizations, businesses, etc. in the downtown area and in the greater metropolitan area, beyond those already deemed to be part of the broader Gower congregation.

Priority Focus Area #2: *Gower as a downtown United Church*

Gower is one of four downtown United Churches along with downtown Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches. The current downtown United Church situation is generally accepted as unsustainable but there is currently no-agreed upon plan or even tentative scenarios to address this looming issue.

Recommended Objectives

- 2.1 Continue to be actively and consistently involved in the downtown United Church committee and to provide leadership therein.
- 2.2 In as far as possible, encourage and lead the downtown committee and/or the Boards of the respective churches to collaboratively develop longer-term rationale scenarios involving a decrease in the number of downtown pastoral charges. Consideration should also be given to including other United Churches (not in the downtown core) in St. John's in this process since any reorganization of downtown pastoral charges could conceivably involve one or more non-downtown pastoral charges. Those involved in developing such scenarios, should also consider how the land and buildings assigned to each existing pastoral charge could collectively be repurposed to best align with the needs of: any proposed new downtown pastoral charge configuration(s); The United Church in the St. John's area; the downtown community; and the City.
- 2.3 With respect to Objective 2.2, seek advice, planning resources, and leadership from East District and NL Conference.
- 2.4 In the shorter-term undertake planning and preparations to take advantage of any emergent opportunities to share and economize on resources and special events/programming with some or all of the other downtown United Churches. Examples are continuation of joint services, shared special

events, integration of aspects of supply & services operations, sharing an administrative staff person who devotes X% of time to one church and Y% to another, a ministerial staff person with responsibility for a particular area at two or more churches (e.g., child & youth ministry, pastoral care). This undertaking should also include exploration of possibilities for shared supply & services with selected non-United Church downtown churches.

Priority Focus Area #3: *Gower and sustainability*

An overarching goal in this focus area is to sustain Gower as a congregation, as a faith community, and as a broader organization that includes people who participate in Gower activities but may not attend traditional worship services and may not see themselves as members or adherents in the traditional senses.

Recommended Objectives

- 3.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive, longer-term stewardship plan. It should span the entire spectrum of stewardship including, but not necessarily limited to, weekly/monthly offering, special offerings, targeted fundraising campaigns, large donations including bequests from estates, fundraising events, gifts of time and talent. Such an approach to stewardship would include but may go beyond the actual or perceived mandate of the Stewardship Committee. As part of the proposed longer-term stewardship plan, develop and implement a strategy for raising awareness about stewardship and communicating the stewardship plan and its results on a regular basis.
- 3.2 Significantly increase the occupancy rate of the building both on the rental side (to generate revenue) and pro bono (as in-kind support of fundraising, social services, and other charitable activities) taking into account: (a) alignment with our overall mission, (b) alignment with the proposed longer-term outreach plan (objective 4.1); (c) whether Gower is positioned to provide the type of space or facility required, (d) hub location in downtown core, and (e) achieving a sustainable mixture of pro bono and rental occupancy.
- 3.3 In the near-term, invest time and effort to develop several alternative scenarios or models for operating and maintaining the present or perhaps modified physical structure that would (a) significantly reduce the annual amount paid from the church's general operating fund to operate and maintain the building, while (b) providing access to sufficient and suitable space for worship, Sunday school, meetings, events, etc. at a significantly reduced cost compared to current costs. In developing these scenarios due consideration should be given to the heritage aspect of the 1896 part of the present structure. Cochrane Street United Church and George Street United Church are in the process of implementing such models; their models may or may not be suitable for Gower but understanding their models is a logical first step towards the goal of having some feasible alternatives prepared proactively versus having to react to a crisis.
- 3.4 Develop, maintain annually, and communicate on a regular basis a narrative version of the Gower budget. A narrative budget is not the traditional line-item revenue-expense presentation of an organization's finances. Generally, all of a church's functioning and activities are assigned to one of a relatively small number of agreed-upon operational areas (there are various ways to approach this; an example of a scenario is: worship, pastoral care, Christian education, outreach, capital projects, physical facilities, church administration not in direct support of the identified operational areas). Once a narrative budget categorization is achieved, existing budget expense items are assigned pro

rata to each category and a supporting narrative is written to describe purpose, activities, changes, and forecasts in each category. The narrative budget approach complements traditional budget presentations and, by identifying fraction of overall budget associated with each major category, provides valuable insight on the implicit assignment of fiscal resources to each category and facilitates assessment of the degree to which congregational priorities are aligned with priorities. The narrative budget should be available to the broader congregation on a regular basis (e.g., website, newsletters) and a presentation of it should form part of the budget presentation at the annual congregational meeting in February.

- 3.5 Create and publicize a separate internal “virtual” account to show near-term and long-term forecasted annual revenue-expense budgets for the physical plant. On the expense side this should include all regular operating costs (heat, power, water, custodial), routine maintenance and repairs, pro-rated long-term major maintenance, and pro-rated capital improvements. On the revenue side this should include rental income, building specific fundraising/donations, and annual transfer from church’s general operating fund (mostly regular givings). Such an analysis will be needed to support business-model aspects of any new scenarios for operating and maintaining the church building (objective 3.3) and will educate us about the true cost of operating the current physical plant. Objective 3.5 stands alone but would form a natural part of an overall narrative budget if the latter were adopted as recommended in Objective 3.4.

Priority Focus Area #4: *Gower and society*

Although Gower does contribute to the downtown community, the Gower congregation has indicated a desire for even greater support of the local community. Gower must take a measured approach to expanding our outreach involvement to ensure we align to the external needs and work within our resources. Some degree of disconnect with The United Church Mission and Service Fund (M&S) emerged in the Input Phase of preparing Vision 2025; this matter should be addressed.

Recommended Objectives

- 4.1 Develop a longer-term plan for Gower’s goals and involvement in regular (weekly/monthly/seasonally) and in episodic outreach activities and social programs in the downtown area and greater St. John’s area, and also in Mission and Services activities of The United Church of Canada. The proposed longer-term plan should include a review of the nature, extent, and resource requirements of recent and current Gower participation in outreach and social programs, activities and projects. External stakeholders and potential partners should be consulted in developing this plan.
- 4.2 For the time being maintain current level and mix of direct and supporting involvement in outreach and social programs, activities and projects.
- 4.3 Incremental participation in new (to Gower) outreach, mission and service, and social programs, activities and projects should align with the proposed longer-term outreach plan (4.1), should be approved by the Board. The capacity of Gower to support the participation (fiscal resources and volunteer capacity to take on the requisite roles) should be part of the planning and decision-making process.
- 4.4 In developing the scenarios/models for future operation and maintenance of the physical plant (objective 3.3) and in developing a longer-term outreach plan (objective 4.1), that consideration be given to alignment of the space needs of existing and/or in-demand outreach programs or social services with the various types of space and facilities in the present church building.

- 4.5 Take a leadership or co-leadership role in identifying outreach and social needs and opportunities, and in coordinating outreach and social services organizations (churches, non-profits, religious orders, government agencies) in maintaining and improving social, food and safety net services in the core and greater downtown.
- 4.6 Intentionally increase awareness within Gower of The United Church of Canada Mission and Service (M&S) priorities, projects and activities through regular communications and dissemination of M&S materials. This objective stands alone but should also be a component of the longer-term outreach plan proposed in objective 4.1 and of the integrated communications plan proposed later below.

VII. Implementation

Crucial to making incremental year-over-year progress in the priority focus areas and in achieving the supporting objectives over the next ten years is consistent and intentional stewardship in the implementation of *Vision 2025*. Primary responsibility for implementation rests with the Board and the Board Executive, the latter serving as the official planning body of the church under the Gower Constitution. Secondary responsibility lies with committees, clubs, and groups and with the ministerial staff. Since internal and external factors can and likely will change over a ten-year period, it is important to build flexibility into a long-term plan by calling for formal updates on a periodic basis between 2015 and 2025. Another important aspect of implementation is regular reporting on progress to the broader Gower congregation and to community partners.

The following **recommendations** concerning implementation **are directed to the Board**.

Recommendation A: That the Board and Board Executive accept responsibility for implementation of, and periodic formal updates to, *Vision 2025* and develop an explicit operational framework for so doing. Normalizing implementation is particularly important because the ten-year horizon of *Vision 2025* exceeds the term of appointment of the most Board and committee members and may include a transition in ministerial staff.

Recommendation B: That *Vision 2025* be formally updated at three-year intervals on the following cycle: at the end of year 3 (February 2019); and at the end of year 6 (February 2022) and that a new long-term plan be developed in 2025 for implementation in 2026. The updates at the ends of years 3 and 6 should be accompanied by a progress report on accumulated implementation of *Vision 2025* to date. The plan update should include new/modified goals in any or all focus areas, as appropriate and should explicitly indicate which goals that are being removed from the active list due to completion thereof.

Recommendation C: Further to Recommendations A and B, that the Board integrate implementation and progress tracking of *Vision 2025* into its annual priority setting and work plan for each church year and that all Committees and clubs/groups set their annual goals and priorities guided by both the Board's annual priorities and work plan and by *Vision 2025*.

Recommendation D: That the Board provide quarterly or semi-annually (at a minimum) progress reports to the Congregation on implementation of *Vision 2025*. These reports could be usefully expanded to also include progress on the Board's overall work plan for the year. (The Seasonal Newsletters, the Annual Report, email distribution, and the website are possibilities for dissemination.)

Recommendation E: That, in implementing the objectives set out in this report or plans, initiatives, projects, or programs arising from these objectives, the Board provide an appropriate level of fiscal resources, either incremental resources, or a reallocation of existing resources, or in some combination.

The following **recommendation** concerning communications **is directed to the Board**.

Recommendation F: That to support the implementation of *Vision 2025*, and equally to enhance and advance the ongoing life and work of Gower, a comprehensive communications strategy and an associated operational plan be developed and adopted by the Board. The communications plan should span all facets of church life, activities, programs, and operations, and embrace the full spectrum of communication modalities. Further, consideration should be given to an oversight and coordination role having ongoing functional responsibility for operationalizing a communications strategy.

VIII. Summary

Vision 2025 is an ambitious plan but is not beyond our reach. It builds on 200 years of being Gower. It does not present a radical change in direction, but it is progressive, and calls upon us to be proactive in addressing some major challenges that have been re-identified in the input phase and have gathered momentum over the past 25 years.

The cornerstones of *Vision 2025* are Gower's Existing Strengths, Gower's Current and Continuing Challenges, the Four Priority Focus Areas, and its Implementation. The content of each of these sections of the plan is summarized below.

Existing Strengths

1. Prominent and Influential Downtown Church
2. Worship
3. Pastoral Care
4. Community Outreach
5. Inclusivity
6. Social activities and network
7. People
8. Fiscal Resources

Current and Continuing Challenges

1. The Demographic Challenge
2. The Societal Challenge
3. The Physical Challenge
4. The Communications Challenge

Priority Focus Areas

- #1: *Gower as people – participation, engagement, and leadership*
- #2: *Gower as a downtown United Church*
- #3: *Gower and sustainability*
- #4: *Gower and society*

Implementation

Six recommendations are made, primary among them is the one recommending that the Board assume primary responsibility for implementing *Vision 2025*. The next four concern integrating implementation in the annual work plans for the Board and Committees/Clubs/Groups, formal updates to *Vision 2025* at the end of year 3 and year 6, regular reporting on implementation progress, and resourcing the implementation of *Vision 2025*. The sixth recommendation calls for the creation of a church-wide communications strategy.

Vision, Mission, and Core Values Statement

The creation of a new statement is recommended.

IX. Acknowledgments

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For assistance with postings on the web site: Ken Butt

For facilitating the open congregational focus group session and the external focus group session: Dr. Jean Brown (Cochrane Street United Church)

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