**Toward Standing Committee and Staff articulation of a Vision of Ministry for 2016-17.**

Dan Hotchkiss argues that one of the ways that congregation’s can more fully realize their mission is developing an annual Vision of Ministry that summarizes the areas of ministry that the Staff Team working with Ministry Teams will prioritize during the coming year. As we move toward embracing a more appropriate organization of First Parish governance and ministry, we have asked if we can “give the Vision of Ministry idea a trial run.”

Choosing appropriate projects, or breakthrough priorities during an interim period comes with several caution flags. The projects / and priorities should be congruent with the “Tasks of Interim Work.” Since helping the congregation understand itself, help the congregation work on how it makes decisions, and chooses leaders are key interim tasks. Helping the congregation embrace its future with confidence is another interim task. Starting projects that depends on the new settled minister to complete are not appropriate interim tasks.

So I am proposing that helping the congregation understand why it is stuck in a growth plateau,

and why simply adding more members will not resolve the ‘stickiness.” If the congregation has “no room” for a lot more members then those new comers will leave.

Many church leaders have observed that congregational growth is about many things—not just numbers. A human being grows not just in height, but in girth, and not just in body but in terms of mental ability, emotional maturity, and spiritual depth. As individual human beings grow they acquire skills, both “social skills” and “technical skills.” All of these very different aspects of growth support each other and reinforce one another. A person is not likely to be considered mature just because their body is that of an adult and they are clever intellectually. We also look for resilience in the face of crisis, for depth of spirit, and for sound judgement.

Congregations that simply add members will lose those members if they are not growing in qualitative ways to support those new members. Four ways that congregations grow are:

 **Maturational growth**—enhancing spiritual maturity of each member, and growth in sense of identity as a religious community.

 **Relational or organic growth**—the congregation’s relational wholeness, its capacity to function at the size that it has become, its ability to include all of its members, its ability to make decisions and carry them out, and its ability to embrace conflict and resolve differences in through open, democratic processes

**Incarnational growth**—making real and living our values in the world. Living into the mission.

**Numerical growth**— refers to increases in the number of people attending worship and programs, and the number of members who join, pledge, and participate in the shared ministry.

“Each of these areas relates to the others: as our congregations grow in health, maturity, and outward-focused values, we support our growth in numbers.” (UUA website)

It is my assessment that I have shared before that the congregation has understood growth primarily in numerical terms and the congregation is good in welcoming and providing opportunities for new comers to find ways to join. And the congregation is stronger than many others in living into its mission (incarnational growth.) Yet the congregation does not provide enough opportunities for maturational growth for members. And the congregations is organized as a pastoral congregation, that is a congregation of less than 150 active members. Therefore it is relationally or organically immature. In addition First Parish has a history of disputes that have alienating members of the congregation. Conflicts happen because human beings see the world in different ways, and conflicts well managed can result in depth of understanding and creative new ways of doing things. How congregations engage conflicts can make a big difference. It is a characteristic of relational growth, it is also a characteristic of maturational growth.

But in order to understand a move forward in a wholistic way we must tackle all four ways congregations grow. Tackling these may not result in immediate gains in the size of First Parish. As we said above we are giving “the Vision of Ministry idea a trial run.” We are practicing, learning to articulate a vision of ministry. But we are doing this before our governance working group has finished its work, and before our budget process has been reoriented fundamentally from maintaining the institution to supporting the mission and growth.

The obstacles to growth are not superficial, they will take sustained work to change.

First Parish could see 300 members in a five years if their were sufficient shared ministries to sustain that growth. For that to happen their must be a strong relation with between the Standing Committee and the Staff Team working on common Visions of Ministry that will unfold those new shared ministries. Some of these new shared ministries will impact staff priorities and will require new funding. Thus the standing committee must lead and be proactive in developing the vision of ministry before the budget is finalized.

Vision of Ministry working draft of projects to be worked on.

1. Continue to develop and complete by May 2017 our shared ministry and membership data base. *(numerical growth.)*
2. Have an accessible on line photo directory of the members. *(numerical growth., relational growth.)*

3. Organize and sustain an appropriate number of small group ministries and small group spiritual growth groups. I see this as four to eight groups by May 2017. *(maturational growth)*

4. Re-envision our Religious Education Committee into a life span spiritual growth and religious education council which will include an adult educational component. *(maturational growth)*

5. Work to extend our work around anti racism, anti oppressive and multicultural transformation (ARAOMC) so that becomes more clearly ‘central to all that we do.” We will examine our work at Standing Committee and in Staff Meetings with an ARAOMC lens. We will provide a ARAOMC progress report in the month before Candidate Week. *(incarnational growth.)*

6. We will access our relations with our community partners and help educate our members on how these organizations help us live into our mission. We will access how these organizations allow FPC to expand its shared ministry possibilities. *(incarnational growth. relational growth.)*

*7* Continue to work on Governance transformation.with an understanding that fundamentally this is a contribution to clarity about roles and accountability to our mission. It is therefore fundamental to living into our mission. *(incarnational growth.relational growth.)*

8. Develop a right relations task force that will promote a culture of beloved community helping the congregation move toward more creative ways of resolving conflict, and facilitating communication of members with leaders as guided by the Covenant of Right Relations. *(incarnational growth.relational growth.)*

**Summary of Interim Activities since April Standing Committee.**

I have responded to pastoral care concerns among members, and helped with the planning of 4 worship services.

 I have worked with staff on defining their job descriptions and we have done considerable work around re-envisioning personnel. This is reflected in the personnel report that Carol has shared with the Standing Committee.

 I have worked with Mass Action, Sanctuary and the UU Urban Ministry which are FPC community partners. I participated in the Sanctuary worship service in early April.

I have continue to coach and give counsel to the FPC ARAOMC transformation efforts.