

The Isaiah Project Story

First Congregational United Church of Christ (FCUCC) has undertaken a generational challenge to vision and carry out a successful future for the congregation. This work, titled: “The Isaiah Project” builds upon the past 14 years of visioning and planning for future growth and success of the Congregation. The Isaiah Project was formalized in the spring of 2024 and is the next evolutionary step following many efforts listed below. The roots of The Isaiah Project are much deeper, however.

This document will share information on the history of FCUCC continuing transformation, the current state of these efforts including progress and plans and addresses future plans of the project.



THE ISAIAH PROJECT

Origins

First Congregational moved to its current location in 1968 from the beloved old Red Brick Church which the congregation had outgrown. A strength of the then Long -Range Planning Committee was to plan and build a church campus that would serve the needs and purposes of the congregation for many years. For approximately the first thirty-five years, the structure needed minimal updates beyond normal cyclical maintenance. Two upgrades of note were completed between 1968 and 1991. First, was the addition of an elevator in the narthex in 1984 to improve accessibility issues. It should be noted that FCUCC was built in an era when accessibility was not forefront in people’s minds. In a 1991 capital campaign, expenditures were allocated to upgrading the organ to solid state functionality and roof repair and replacement. With the exception of the previously noted maintenance, the campus structures have aged well being maintained through support of a building reserve fund (now depleted) and diligent attention by the Building and Grounds Committee.

2010’s – A Period to Consider Upgrades

The Impetus

Beginning over 10 years ago, FCUCC began a series of efforts to consider the future of our congregation and our church home. This was driven by a significant decline in the demographics of mainline churches. From 2011 to 2020, attendance in Wisconsin UCC churches fell 44%. In addition, First Congregational faced major maintenance and renovation costs with our aging, 57-year-old church building.

Horizon Committee

In 2015, the Church Council created the Horizons Building Team to address needs and goals of the congregation. This group's function was to make recommendations to support the church's mission and how the facilities support that mission. Three primary needs were listed: 1 - lack of access, 2 - gathering space, and 3 – the 10-year capital maintenance plan. The committee worked diligently over three years and had presented building update recommendations to the Church Council when the covid pandemic arrived, stopping all planning in its tracks. It should be noted that many recommendations made by this group still exist and are addressed in the current Isaiah Project.

2020's - A Renewed Effort and Vision

Vandersall Collective Project

In 2021, The Vandersall Collective was engaged to support an analysis of what future steps the congregation may take to continue its future visioning journey. In March of 2022, Vandersall submitted a comprehensive report reviewing their findings and outlining various choices for FCUCC to move forward. A summary report was issued and information sessions were held in Fall of 2023. The Vandersall findings captured the mood, feelings, strengths and challenges of the church related to moving forward. A major finding of the report was a renewed effort to bring our purpose and mission forefront as we envision our facilities' future use as well as necessary upkeep. It is this vision, added to the base Horizon Team findings, that support the entry point for the Isaiah Project.

Isaiah Begins

In March 2024 a cadre of committed church members convened as the Isaiah Team to synthesize all of the previous work and move forward with actionable plans. The work was organized around five main groups.

1. *Steering Committee* – provides vision, criteria, and support for the task forces.
2. *Community Partnerships Task Force* – was charged with developing future plans and examining opportunities to live out the church's community mission.
3. *Finance Task Force* – was charged with providing financial guidance and support for the steering committee and all task forces.
4. *Grounds Task Force* – our church is incredibly blessed with some of the most beautiful property in the Appleton area. This task force was charged with visioning and planning how to maximize accessibility, usage, and community use.
5. *Building Task Force* – was charged with analyzing building maintenance needs, and utilizing FCUCC community feedback on desired changes to our buildings that will best support worship, ministries, and church life moving forward.

Isaiah Progress as of Late December 2024

Between March and the end of 2024, all committees met regularly as they considered the charges and goals provided by the steering committee. Currently, progress updates are being prepared to share with the Church Council and the congregation at large. Additional developing information will be shared and a communication plan will inform all church members.