

Strategic Plan for JWUMC – 2023

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Preface:

There is a saying that if you want to give God a good chuckle, then make a plan! The humor in this statement stems from the fact that quite often the plans we have for ourselves and the plans that God has for us are often unaligned, sometimes drastically. So why would JWUMC be presumptuous enough to think that we could make a multi-year plan for our church? We aren't. This document is an effort to discern in what directions God wants John Wesley United Methodist Church to go.

The overarching strategy of JWUMC to achieve its mission is to engage in works that align the following:

- Our Vision: John Wesley will be a strong and vital church in our community where all people know they are invited, loved, and accepted. While putting faith into action we will love God, love others, and serve the world.
- The energy and talents of its congregants and the capacity of its facilities
- The aspirations of its congregation to serve and love God
- The needs of its congregation and its community

Recognizing that all these things are constantly changing, JWUMC must:

- Remain flexible
- Reevaluate its activities regularly
- Put faith in God that by emphasizing service to the world, the congregation will thrive

Thus, the proposed strategic challenges for JWUMC are meant to permeate the prioritization and planning processes for all church ministries for the next several years.

Background:

The last strategic plan for JWUMC was adopted by the Church Council in December of 2013, under the direction of the pastor at the time, David Calhoun. Pastor Rebecca Mincieli arrived at JW in July of 2014. Fast forward to October of 2021, and Pastor Rebecca assembled a committee to write a new strategic plan for JW. However, in early January of 2022 Pastor Rebecca announced plans to retire in June. Nevertheless, the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) began meeting in January of 2022. When Pastor René arrived in July of 2022, the SPT had already created and administered a congregation survey and were working on next steps. They were working with Rev. Betsy Waters, a UMC consultant made available to us through the New England Conference of the UMC. Pastor René joined the strategic planning effort shortly after his arrival.

Process:

Working with Rev. Waters, the SPT endeavored to answer the following three questions:

- **Who are we?**
Our primary means of answering this question was a church survey that was predominantly a multiple-choice format but also allowed for some free-response answers. The survey was developed in

conjunction with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. More than 160 members of the congregation completed the survey. (Full survey results are available for review on the JWUMC website.)

- **Who are our neighbors?**

The purpose of this question is to better understand the local and global community in which we live and identify any unmet needs that John Wesley might, potentially, try to address. To accomplish this, the SPT conducted 17 interviews with community leaders and leaders of various community groups. This was a very revealing exercise and elucidated key opportunities for us to “Serve the World.”

- **Where is God calling John Wesley to go?**

This was the tough question that we prayerfully wrestled with for several months. We strived to find ways to align “who we are?” with “who are our neighbors?” to identify challenges and develop priorities for John Wesley to follow for the next several years.

Opportunities, Goals & Challenges:

1. A Welcoming & Inclusive Church Home for Many:

Opportunity: JWUMC is a welcoming congregation for people of wide-ranging opinions, who appreciate an inclusive, nonjudgmental atmosphere. People of various backgrounds, beliefs and experiences can feel comfortable at JWUMC. This is a notable strength, especially in our currently polarized society. We currently make our facilities available to various outside groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous, ESL Tutoring, The Girl Scouts, a Brazilian church congregation, and Samaritans.

Goal: To continue to be a church “home” for people of varying backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences.

Challenge: 1) To embrace congregants of differing opinions on social and political viewpoints so that they can feel comfortable at JW, while at the same time helping one another to understand and adapt to constant and rapid changes in our society. 2) To maximize the use of our facilities by groups that we feel share our commitment to Love God, Love Others, and/or Serve the World.

2. Worship and Spiritual Growth:

Opportunity: There is a strong desire to reach a broader audience such as young and diverse families, young adults, and the unchurched through vibrant, meaningful, and alternative worship experiences; and a felt-need to strengthen the spiritual life of the congregation, through small groups, Bible study groups, and outward-focused mission opportunities.

Goal: To become a leading and influential church that is ready to reach out, welcome, and engage our community; support and inspire discipleship; and send our congregation out into God’s mission field.

Challenges: 1) To reach different demographic groups without sacrificing existing worship and program offerings. 2) To recruit and train volunteers (musicians, small group/Bible study leaders, youth center leaders, etc.) who will be willing to serve in new ministry opportunities. 3) To enhance our current spiritual growth opportunities.

3. Meeting Community Needs:

Opportunity: Falmouth has several serious unmet community needs: lack of affordable housing, a large segment of our population is in recovery, food insecurity, lack of transportation options particularly among the elderly, etc. JW as a congregation, and as individuals, has a big heart for meeting the physical and social needs of the vulnerable among us here in Falmouth.

Goal: For JW to play an intentional and active role in helping to meet at least one of the major unmet needs in Falmouth, perhaps in conjunction with other congregations.

Challenge: To analyze our assets, our gifts, and passions as a congregation to determine which unmet need(s) we are best able to meet and figure out a strategy to try to do it.

4. Children & Youth Growth Opportunities:

Opportunity: JW has a small, but vibrant, youth program with strong leadership and broad, stated congregational support and recognition that youth need help in developing their Christian faith. But our congregation is short on volunteers to work with our youth and support their church activities. Meanwhile, community groups emphasized that children today are quite vulnerable to societal pressures and in desperate need of support, especially as we emerge from the recent pandemic and as young families in Falmouth face increasing economic stress.

Goal: To further develop and strengthen our youth outreach and spiritual support programs by soliciting more help from our congregation and perhaps by coordinating with other church congregations..

Challenge: To continue to strengthen relationships among our children and youth within the congregation and with the community.

Justification Notes

Justification for Opportunity, Goal & Challenge #1: A Welcoming & Inclusive Church Home:

- Question 17–6: “Our church's approach to social issues is basically educational, leaving any action to individual conscience OR is decidedly "activist". We take stands on social issues as a congregation.” Responses to this question on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being educational and 7 being activist) was only slightly skewed toward the educational side, with the largest percentage in the middle. The distribution of responses was a fairly “normal” distribution. (a “bell” curve)
- Question 34: Which one of the following best expresses your view of the Bible? The possible responses ranged from “The Bible is an ancient book of history, legends and cultural stories recorded by man. It has little value today except as classic literature.” To, “The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be taken literally.” The responses were, once again, fairly “normally distributed” (bell curve but slightly skewed towards the “literal” response). But fully 46% chose the response, “The Bible is the inspired Word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error.”

Comments from the congregation:

“Don't want to politicize the pulpit.”

“The United States population is deeply divided between "liberals" and "conservatives", right and left, Republicans and Democrats, "Trumpists" and non Trumpists, believers of the "Big lie" and non-believers, those who seek truth and fact and those who promote conspiracies... the list goes on. I know our church congregation shares the divisions. What are we going to do about it? Can we talk to each other?”

“Hope for no political rhetoric flowing from the pulpit.”

“I would like us to focus more on the Bible and it's teaching rather than political or social issues.”

“I hope that we are tolerant of people with opposing views and not just the opinion du jour.”

“I hope our church will stay out of the divisive political issues that plague our nation. There are two sides to every issue and to placate one side will just inflame the other.”

“We are a courageous church, opening our church to self help groups during Covid and taking stands on controversial issues.”

“I hope to combine the past with the present. To keep some of the traditions I so love, while realizing the world is changing, and so are the people in it and we need to be respectful of that so that everyone feels welcome at JWUMC.”

“I highly support our reaching out to our community to help in ways that we can, bring groups into our church to use the facilities which makes people/groups feel welcome and in itself is an outreach. We have gained a few people who attend our church now coming from, for example AA.”

Justification for Opportunity, Goal & Challenge #2: Worship & Spiritual Growth:

- Question 23-2: 94% of the congregation is either very satisfied or satisfied with Sunday worship, other than the music.
- Question 23-1: 89% of the congregation is either very satisfied or satisfied with the music during Sunday worship.
- Question 32: What attracted you to JW in the first place? Worship style (55%) is second only to the minister (63%).
- Question 33: What keeps you at JW? Worship style (59%) is second only to the minister (78%).
- Question 9: Overall, which ONE task does your church do best? Given a choice of 16 different tasks, 48% chose, "Offering worship that provides a meaningful experience of God and the Christian tradition."
- Question 8 – 6: 24% of the congregation felt that "Sharing the good news of the Gospel with the unchurched" needs more emphasis. This was one of the highest "needs more emphasis" answers for this question.
- Question 32 & 33: What attracted you to JW or what keeps you at JW? Under "other" many folks mentioned the friendly, welcoming environment at JW.
- Question 7: 31% of congregants have not invited someone to church in the last year.

Comments from the congregation:

"Have more children in the church. More young couples"

" Dream of a live vibrant church with young families and adults.

"I would like to see an emphasis on seeking and growing the church with young families. Young families need our support and love and also the church cannot grow or have meaning unless we have younger families."

"I hope we find a way to reach the unchurched young and old around our community. So many have a clear need for God in their lives but don't know how to fill the gap. I would like to see an emphasis on trying to invite new people to our services as a regular part of who we are."

"I would like to see a vibrant church where members are involved in each other's lives. A church that addresses relevant issues facing young people today and a church with a significant number of young people (under 30)."

"The church should make a special effort to engage and recruit young families."

"That we can attract more young families with children. Families willing to participate in the future of JW."

“Our church has few young couples/ younger families and a huge elderly population. With all the changes I worry that people will leave the church and we do not/will not have a younger part of the congregation to grow with the church. We need to do better recruiting people ages 20-40 if we want to have growth and stability in the future.”

Justification for Opportunity, Goal & Challenge #3: Meeting Community Needs

- Question 8 – 9: 29% felt that “Providing a caring ministry for the sick, shut-ins and bereaved” needs more emphasis. This particular question received the highest “needs more emphasis” responses from respondents.
- Question 8 – 15: 32% of the congregation felt that “Participating in activities and programs with other religious groups” needs more emphasis. (Of the 15 choices in this question, this was the highest percentage for “Needs more emphasis.”)
- Question 10-7: For the sake of your own personal involvement in the congregation, which one task would you most like to see strengthened? Out of 16 possible options, “Engaging in acts of charity and service to people in need” the highest number of responses. (15%)
- Question 13-2: Our church is very involved with the community – 62% gave it a 1 or 2 out of 7
- Question 29-1: In your judgment, how high or low a priority would you like each of the following to be for the way the congregation could be involved with community and social issues? “Providing or supporting social services for persons in need” – 59% made this a high priority and 38% made it a moderate priority.
- Question 29-2: Providing meeting rooms in the church for community groups working on various issues and problems. 60% made this a high priority and 34% made it a moderate priority.
- Question 30-1: If your congregation were able to raise significantly more money than currently budgeted, how high a priority would you give to the following uses of that money? “Increased support for community and social service programs” 45% would make it a high priority and 44% would make it a moderate priority.
- In our interviews with community leaders, these unmet needs were mentioned by many.

Comments from the congregation:

“I feel the church has done a very good job in supporting the community. The community outreach is excellent and should continue.”

“I hope we can improve and expand our interactions with the community - we have a lot to offer!”

“We have a great church already but even more involvement with the community would make it better.”

“I like that the church opens its doors to groups of needs within the community, it shows we are a compassionate and caring church.”

“We should expand our interaction with the community even more than we currently do (and we do quite a bit).”

“The church (should) be open to the needs of the community and a place where they feel welcomed. The church needs to focus its resources on the missions of people and not the beautification of the building. Feed the world physically and spiritually, accepting all as children of God.”

“I highly support our reaching out to our community to help in ways that we can, bring groups into our church to use the facilities which makes people/groups feel welcome and in itself is an outreach.”

“I wish for a major outreach plan for helping the children/families who are in trouble around us.”

“I would like to see our church do more for our neighboring countries as well as our own community.”

“My desire and hope would be to reach out and help our underprivileged population, more than we are doing at this time in our community.”

“Higher involvement in community, other churches, and social issues.”

“Develop action plans to fulfill the identified needs of the community.”

“My desire and hope would be to reach out and help our underprivileged population, more than we are doing at this time ‘in our community.’”

“Help more people in need.”

“I wish for a major outreach plan for helping the children & families who are in trouble around us.”

“To see: more social involvement with the community in order to help the homeless, the poor, the immigrants, and others who is in need of help.”

Comments from the community:

In an interview with a representative from one of the AA groups that uses our facilities for daily meetings, the question was asked, “What role is there for a church like ours to meet the unmet needs of our community?” The response was, “You’re doing it! You’re making the Fellowship Hall available to us; it’s a great space; great location; plenty of parking in the back. JW has been fantastic in support of our groups!”

Both Belonging to Each Other and Habitat for Humanity representatives cited that JWUMC members were consistent volunteers.

Justification for Opportunity, Goal & Challenge #4: Children & Youth Growth Opportunities:

- Question 8: Listed below are a number of tasks that a local church is likely to perform. 62% of people said that they were very satisfied with the Christian education for children and youth, 28% said they were generally satisfied, and 7% said it needed more emphasis.
- Question 9: 8% of respondents said that providing Christian education for children and youth was the ONE task the congregation does best.
- Question 10: 4% of respondents said that providing Christian education for children and youth was the ONE task they would like to see strengthened.
- Question 22: 96% of respondents said that they were very satisfied or generally satisfied with having parts of the worship service for children.
- Question 27: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the Christian Education program? A vast majority (95%+) were either very satisfied or satisfied with both the grades 0-4 program as well as the grades 5-12 program.
- Question 32: 23% of respondents said that the children & youth programs originally attracted them to the church while (question 33) 28% of respondents said that the children and youth programs were the reason why they stayed here.

Comments from the congregation:

“To see: programs aimed at our teenagers to keep them from leaving the church after their confirmation, like music, bands, sports, discussion clubs, etc.”

“I would like to see an emphasis on seeking and growing the church with young families. Young families need our support and love and also the church cannot grow or having meaning unless we have younger families.”

“Have more children in the church. More young couples.”

“I believe younger families are needed to become members, in order for this Church to survive.”

“I wish for the youth program to expand and grow”

“We need a variety of services and service times to attract a wider more diverse group of people. Including more youth and young adults. I was expecting a larger increase in number of children participating in Sunday school when we hired a full time youth director. Though there has been strong retention of youth.”

“Dream of a live vibrant church with young families and adults.”

“I believe the church needs to focus on attracting younger individuals and families. There are a number of ways this can succeed over the long term such as: 1. Adding a more contemporary worship service in addition to the more traditional service 2. Adding a second full time minister to share duties with the senior minister. 3.

Even in the traditional service, introduce somewhat more contemporary Christian music. 4. Building the youth programs to attract young people who can later encourage their parents to attend. 5. More outreach to the community 6. Launch a more robust small discussion group ministry

Comments from Community:

- **Volunteers in Public Schools:** There is a need for more tutors and academic coaches for grades K-12.
- **Gus Cauty Rec Center:** Kids need more positive mentors in order to address the problems they face.
- **Wellstrong:** Asked for assistance with childcare.

Interviews with Community Leaders and Leaders of Community Groups

- Rep. David Vieira - Mass. State Legislature Representative for Barnstable County 3rd District
- Susan Moran - Massachusetts State Senator
- Danielly Aklexandrov - Exec. Dir. & Alicia Conlin-Program Director for WellStrong - Fitness & Wellness
- Drawde Geishecker- Director Falmouth Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS)
- Jackie Keaney - Falmouth Recreation Center
- Olivia Masih White - No Place for Hate
- Susan Loucks - Former Executive Director of Neighborhood Falmouth
- Ginny Irving - Resource Development Mgr. Habitat for Humanity of Cape Cod
- Danae Young - Gosnold Behavioral Health
- Deputy Chief Chad Absten - Falmouth Fire Department
- Kerin Delaney, Executive Director - Falmouth Service Center
- Jill Bishop, Director & Lauren Haddad, Outreach Coordinator - Falmouth Senior Center
- Scott McGann, Health Agent - Falmouth Health Department
- Matt Fazzino - 7:30 am Meeting Coordinator at John Wesley for Alcoholics Anonymous
- Eliza Morrison, Program Manager - AIDS Support Group of Cape Cod
- Joe Lima, President - Cape Cod PFLAG
- Gina Torielli, Executive Director - Belonging To Each Other-Falmouth