

HEARTLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REPORT OF THE HEARTLAND PLANNING WORKSHOP CONNECTION AND CREATION MARCH, 2023



This report summarizes the work and recommendations of the Heartland Planning Workshop (HPW). Part One includes the draft of the proposed Connection and Creation strategic plan.

Part Two includes much of the background material, for those who would like to learn more about the plan's themes and why the HPW members made the recommendations that they did.

Introduction

In the fall of 2022, the Session approved a strategic planning process for Heartland. The purpose was to enhance our ability to carry out God's mission in the environment in which we anticipate operating over the next five years. The members of the group—known as the Heartland Planning Workshop (HPW)—included Susan Beblawi, Darca Boom, Judy Bradshaw, Jude Conway, Henry DeBruijn, Deb Hansen, Laura Juliano, Dave McNally, Mac Mackenzie, Julie Olson, Eden Pearson, LuAnn Smith, Laura Taylor-Lloyd, Alex Thornburg, and Paul Volker.

The Planning Process

The Session and HPW members identified six areas of focus: social justice/public witness; children and youth; environmental sustainability; diversity, equity, and inclusion; spiritual development; and financial, facilities, and membership sustainability. The HPW reviewed Heartland's history, operations, and current circumstances; conducted an "environmental scan" (an examination of political, economic, social, technological, demographic, and religious trends in our region and beyond); and discussed Heartland's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The Planning Process (cont'd.)

Based on this research into Heartland's background and circumstances, as well as the issues facing our community and world, the HPW brainstormed approximately 90 potential strategic initiatives as a starting point. The group narrowed this list to 63 items for discussion and further consideration before developing the draft Connection and Creation plan.

We noted that societal trends, including declining participation in religious life, have left people in desperate need of genuine and loving personal relationships. We are concerned about issues such as climate change, mental health, isolation, and conflict in the world and in our local community, and we believe that addressing those and other needs begins with people knowing one another and discerning God's will for our lives. This plan focuses on building connections among people and with God, both in the church and beyond our walls.

Next Steps

Heartland has many programs and ministries that are deeply meaningful to the church and the community. This plan recommends some promising enhancements and new areas of emphasis but is not intended to replace what is already working well. Current priorities (think of Sunday morning worship, for example) will continue to be central to the life of the church, but we did not feel the need to reiterate everything that we already do in this plan; rather, the initiatives focus on new or expanded programs specifically designed to support the theme of connection. The HPW is seeking reactions and suggestions, after which we will revise the plan if needed and present it to the Session for their consideration and approval.

HEARTLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028



Heartland Presbyterian Church is a Christ-centered community called to provide opportunities for creative and inclusive worship, spiritual growth, and service. We welcome any searching member of the community, no matter where you are in your faith journey, regardless of age, race, gender or sexual orientation.

Heartland's mission is to connect to God, connect to each other, and connect to the excluded and vulnerable.

Strategic Planning Vision

In the next five years, Heartland will significantly enhance our connections with members of our local and global communities and with one another.



STRATEGIC VISIONING



CHRIST IS CONNECTION!

In the next five years Heartland will significantly enhance our connections with members of our local and global communities and with one another.

Our growing awareness of the disconnections people in our communities are experiencing at all ages and especially among young people defines our desire to build spaces and ways for people to find God in creative endeavors; in God's Creation; in relationships with the vulnerable and excluded; in young people; and in our life together as a congregation. These initiatives are opportunities for us to deepen and spiritually grow in our connections to God, to each other, and to others in our community.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Connecting to God through the Arts

➤ Create an arts-based educational program

This program will initially have an emphasis on young people, including those not associated with the church. Heartland will provide lessons for those who would not otherwise have access to them, financial support, transportation, and group performance opportunities, including worship. The activities will be designed to help participants develop relationships with one another and with the church. We will initially draw on Heartland's strengths in music and then expand to other artistic and creative endeavors, and broaden the initiative beyond youth if interest and resources allow.

➤ Build an outdoor performance space and enhance Heartland's ability to host artistic/creative events

Heartland's jazz ministry is distinctive and provides an opportunity for greater outreach to the community. When combined with a new arts-based educational program, the church can become a gathering place for the performing arts in the Western Suburbs, where we worship God through our activities and introduce the larger community to Heartland's ministry. In addition to a new outdoor space, our existing equipment and spaces will be upgraded to facilitate performances and online participation.

➤ Create an audio and video production facility

We will add an audio and video production facility, either within our existing building or as part of a new structure. Media production is critical to communication about all aspects of Heartland in the modern interconnected world. It can also be a centerpiece of youth programming and support the artistic and creative activities of the church as a whole.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Connecting to God in Care for Creation

► Install a solar energy array

Our church is committed to serving all of God's creation, including the natural world. We will make a transition to renewable energy, beginning with our own solar installation. We will also review current practices—particularly as they apply to energy consumption and the use of chemicals for cleaning and landscaping—and adopt new sustainable methods.

► Enhance other environmental sustainability practices

We will host meetings of community partners to share replicable practices. We will review current operations—particularly as they apply to energy consumption and the use of chemicals for cleaning and landscaping—and adopt new sustainable methods. Heartland will also explore ways in which our property can be used to care for creation, including the addition of a pollinator garden.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Connecting to God in the Vulnerable and Excluded

➤ Bring to life our identity as a welcoming Church program

Heartland wants all of God's people to know that our church community exists for them, regardless of whether they have a formal relationship with our church or with any church. This is especially true for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) people, who have often encountered hostility from some elements of the Christian church. We will increase our emphasis on diversity in all elements of Heartland's operations, including worship, youth programs, Christian Education, and music, and ensure that the church displays visible symbols of our desire to welcome everyone.

➤ Expand partnerships with the immigrant community

We will establish a continuing partnership with First Arabic Church that will encourage meaningful relationships and address needs and opportunities for both churches. Heartland will also seek other opportunities to create connections with the region's growing immigrant communities, including through interfaith organizations.

➤ Enhance Refugee Ministry

We will make refugee resettlement a continuing part of Heartland's ministry, including supporting one family per year for the next five years.

➤ Join AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy)

Through AMOS, Heartland will become an active partner with many other organizations addressing serious community needs, including mental health, poverty, health care, and workforce development. These are broad societal problems and we can amplify our church's impact through partnerships with other area churches and service organizations.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Connecting to God in Youth

- Create a signature program for all youth in our community, designed to encourage collaborative activities and relationship-building, such as small group discussions and social events. We will emphasize activities that address issues of greatest concern among our community's youth, including isolation, mental health, and inclusiveness, and will reimagine the Children and Youth Director position as the Director of this new program.
- Launch a pilot program for hosting a youth conference and for offering worship opportunities that encourage young people to grow in their relationships with God and with one another.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Connecting to God in Heartland's Congregational Life

- **Develop a comprehensive small group program for members of the Heartland family and others**

Small groups have the potential to strengthen our church family and connect in deeper ways with the larger community. We will create a staff position charged with enhancing this ministry, including in the areas of spiritual development; support groups for people coping with challenges such as addiction, grieving, and isolation; and discussion groups for people with common concerns such as parenting, social justice, and personal/gender identity. We will also enhance social activities that enable us to connect with one another and with people outside of our church.

- **Establish the spiritual development program as a continuing part of our ministry**

We will appoint a Director of Spiritual Development and create a group responsible for providing spiritual growth opportunities, including activities such as classes, retreats, and contemplative worship and prayer. These programs will emphasize nurturing our relationship with God and creating connections with others who are seeking to do the same.

- **Improve communications and raise Heartland's public profile**

Effective communications are vital to the health of our church. We will improve internal communications to build community and to reflect Heartland's values, emphasizing the ways in which members are connected to one another and featuring stories of our members' engagement in the larger community. We will also enhance external communications—taking advantage of our building and online presence—to convey Heartland's character as a church that is welcoming to all, that is engaged with societal needs, that nurtures relationships among members and the wider community, that cares for creation, and that is a lively, creative space.

- **Conduct an estate campaign and establish an endowment**

Heartland's members support the church generously with their time, talents, and financial resources. We will host a campaign to encourage members and friends to consider supporting the church as part of their estates. We will create an endowed fund as an additional option for donors who wish for their estate gifts to be invested by the church, with the understanding that the fund's income will support Heartland's annual operations.