



*The Strengthen the Church Offering furthers the work of our conference and the national UCC as we work together to strengthen and renew existing congregations, fund leadership development, and provide exciting new programs for youth and young adults.*

**Vision Conversations for Congregations**

Pentecost celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit, which empowered the earliest followers of Jesus to dream new dreams and envision a new future for themselves and their community. In preparation for Pentecost, congregational leaders can engage in crucial questions to listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, imagine new ministries, and discern how to strengthen the church. The American Society of Quality outlines a process called SOAR. “A strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results (SOAR) analysis is a strategic planning tool that focuses an organization on its current strengths and vision of the future for developing its strategic goals.”[[1]](#footnote-1)  Ideally, the conversation would happen church-wide, perhaps on a Sunday, after worship. Alternatively, it could take place in small groups throughout the congregation with a recorder bringing insights back to the Council or Consistory. Or each board, committee, or ministry team could take time to discuss and reflect. Engaging as many people as possible in conversation allows for the best ideas to bubble up.

The wisdom of the community and an action plan can emerge through a SOAR analysis. Use these questions to invite people to dream together about the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results of the congregation.

Strengths

* What was our most significant (recent) moment as a congregation?
* How do we build on what’s best in our congregation?
* When do we feel most proud of our church?
* Why do people join our congregation? Why do they stay?

Opportunities

* What do our neighbors seek?
* How are we different from other congregations?
* Who might like to learn about our church?

Aspirations

* What hopes do we hold deeply in our hearts? What do we yearn for?
* Who are we becoming as a community?
* Where should we go as a congregation?

Results

* When would we know we succeeded?
* How would we measure success?
* What 3-5 steps could we take toward success?

The Council or Consistory, using the insights from the congregation, can analyze the results. Utilizing a meeting solely dedicated to this topic, the congregation’s leaders can summarize the vital ideas on strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. Looking at the 2-3 compelling visions of the future that arose from the conversations and the summary process, the Council or Consistory can identify the one with the most potential (or the one which provides the best starting point). Finally, with results in mind, the Council or Consistory can create an action plan that identifies who will be responsible for implementing steps towards the envisioned goal.

The Council or Consistory will want to report back to the congregation what emerged through this process. Pentecost Sunday would be an appropriate time to share in worship the vision that appeared.

**Resources in the Wider Church**

As you engage in a visioning process, please remember resources available to you in United Church of Christ, including but not limited to:

* Conference Staff – Conference Staff provide an invaluable resource for connecting with resources, ideas, and congregations sharing similar visions.
* Church Building and Loan Fund – Especially for congregation’s whose vision includes questions about a building project or renovation, CBLF Staff can provide consultations and feasibility studies.
* UCC Resources “Acts: Listen Up! Bible Study” – The story of Acts provides a powerful way to reflect on how to live as a Christian community.
* UCC.org – The national setting provides many resources and programs designed to strengthen local congregations.
1. Learn more about conducting a SOAR analysis of your congregation by visiting the American Society of Quality website - <http://asqservicequality.org/glossary/strengths-opportunities-aspirations-results-soar-analysis/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)