

The HCC Visioning Leadership Team has written 4 scenarios to help us imagine what our future could look like. These are dreams, not plans. A taste of them will be presented after worship on 7/11/21 for your feedback. Please read them over and note what captures your imagination, raises questions, or ignites excitement for you. We'd love to hear what you think, and what you are dreaming about for our future together!

Scenario A

Joy in Community

Spring, 2023

It was a beautiful spring this year. The congregation at Heights Christian Church had moved into its new space at Plymouth Church. There was a new sense of enthusiasm as the congregation worshipped together in the chapel, the bright light shining on them through the beautiful arched windows. Some members worshipped on zoom – the technical issues had been solved a while ago. Many members chose to come together for the service. There was joy in being in worship; there was joy in caring for each other, and there was joy in being in service to others.

Once the congregation was relieved of the work and expense of maintaining a building, a new energy arose. Members of the Visioning Team and others had interviewed neighbors and community leaders which revealed significant needs. While Shaker is often seen as an affluent community, it was a surprise to learn that Lomond was a Title I school because of the high poverty rate among its students. Tucked behind the walls of many of the single- and two-family homes in Lomond were many struggling families. The congregation decided to focus on poverty because it intersected with so many other needs: food insecurity, health care, education, homelessness and more. Partnering with community groups and other churches would be a very effective way to have an impact.

Ways of partnering with groups in the community were explored, and new opportunities for service appeared. Focusing efforts on serving “the least of these,” HCC continued its legacy of sharing God’s love with others in many ways. HCC continued to work with Unity in the Community to provide food. Many members also continued to support the work of God Before Guns. Partnering with Family Promise, members had saved some of HCC’s kitchen ware items to use in “going home kits” for previously homeless families who now were able to move into their own homes. Partnering with the Lomond PTO, winter clothing was being collected to donate to Lomond school, to be distributed discreetly to children who did not have adequate warm winter apparel. The warmth of HCC’s hospitality carried over to its mission activities. Members of the congregation experienced a sense of joy as they reached out to others. More opportunities to partner would certainly be in our future. Like the “Little Engine that Could” the HCC congregation continues to make a difference in our community.

Scenario B Joining the Community

Our congregation took a leap of faith a couple of years ago to find out what God has been doing in our neighborhoods, so we could and spread His Word and Grace through our actions.

Moving was quite a feat! We had to clear out the clutter and keep what was essential for us to nest in another church. We found it freeing that we weren't worried about making repairs to the building. We found joy in being a body of worshipers doing God's work.

After a time of adjustment, we saw what missions we wanted to pursue as a congregation. We tried to stay true to our mission of Peace and Justice, guns and violence, our food mission, and Campbell Court.

Our host church had a food and hunger mission, so we volunteered with their congregation to support and work with the Shaker Heights Hunger Center every third Monday of the month.

We continued and enhanced our involvement with God Before Guns. Our congregation assists with writing letters to our governmental offices and leaders. We hosted vigils, town meetings and attended neighborhood gatherings. Our children helped make signs advocating gun control.

Once the pandemic was over, we continued our Thanksgiving Day meal with the residents of Campbell Court. We held church and lunch services with our congregation and residents at Campbell Court.

We continued to honor our youth with the Peace Award and increased the scholarship fund to \$1,000.00.

HCC is collaborating with NewONESHaker organization. NewONESHaker is an inclusive organization that builds community awareness, builds partnerships with the community and promotes Community Advocacy. The prime objective is to educate the community on diversity, equity, and inclusion for people of color, especially supporting our students and their families.

We are looking for volunteers to help with the summer enrichment sessions for our students. We need volunteers to make calls, donate time, and ideas for student enrichment for all grades. Please see me after services today.

It's been quite a journey for HCC! God steered the way for us to be the church in the community. We had to reinvent ourselves and our church, and we are flourishing!

Scenario C Partnering to Meet Needs

HCC church is now fully nesting at Plymouth. Shaker Heights is often thought of as an affluent community which often is the reason for those who move into the City of Shaker Heights. Schools frequently are the drawing card. After kids are raised and out of the home, residents still remain. These include single parents who are not struggling on the poverty financial scale but whose income does not provide for them affordable home ownership in Shaker Heights. It is cost prohibitive. HCC heard this cry from such parents and decided to take up the cross. HCC has decided to look at what it could do to help the least of these in an area not often seen as a need in Shaker. A small team will work with Kamla Lewis, director of Neighborhood Revitalization for the City of Shaker Heights. The partnership with her office will make connections with Huntington Bank where there can be affordable loans available for them. HCC will have information printed in its monthly newsletter. Also monthly individual sessions will be set up with Huntington Bank at a designated place of convenience for interested residents to make loan applications.

HCC assessed the need for and the joy of fellowship with others at the previous monthly community meals. Additionally, assessment was made that our move to Plymouth suggest that the meals would not continue in the same way. Continuing to look for God's will for Heights, the decision was that HCC doesn't have to take the lead in such an effort to serve others but can be a helper, a supporter. Continuing on a monthly basis, Heights has partnered with Church X to provide food and/or volunteer to serve in its community meal. This gives Heights a large community to serve and with whom to commune. It also reduces the difficult task of recruiting from an aging population and thinly stretched population.

Music often soothes the soul. It brings joy to our hearts. Whether the sound is from our own beautiful choir or another gospel choir in at church on Hough Avenue. Music seems to be a flavor that binds us. At the influence from a Shaker Heights active resident, HCC will participate in a supportive partnership role with several other religious congregations to sponsor a song fest in the parking lot of Plymouth in the Spring of 2023. The projection is to have ten choirs from various denominations across Metro Cleveland and beyond to share their joy of music and its connection to our Lord and Savior. HCC expects to have a hallelujah good time praising God while sharing it openly with the community, not behind closed doors.

Scenario D Praising, Learning and Serving Together

What a joy-filled Sunday we are experiencing here at HCC! It is spring of 2023 and we have settled comfortably into our nesting location in the Chapel of Plymouth UCC Church. Our space feels our own, centered around our transported communion table and brightly colored banners. The music is varied and upbeat this week. It is of the same high quality that our congregation has always known and expected. Our new pastor has given a rousing sermon, calling us into service and interaction with the community, as well as grounding us firmly in scripture as she always does.

You can feel the enthusiasm for the many outward-directed activities that are mentioned during the morning announcements. Without the burdens of maintaining our former deteriorating building, people have much more energy to tackle some new initiatives.

One announcement mentions an upcoming meeting of the recently formed Grants Committee. Since we have been able to reduce our operating costs, we have additional monies to disperse for community projects that further our mission, especially projects ministering to children and youth in the Shaker Square area. This month the committee will review a request for monies to be given to Lomond Elementary School and Boulevard Elementary School for the art staff to use in purchasing much needed supplies that the School budget can no longer provide.

One congregant announces a collection of cold weather gear needs to start soon. HCC now sponsors in partnership with an area school's PTO a "Wall of Love". The men of the congregation have built a travelling fence display and everyone will be donating mittens, scarves, coats, sweaters, etc. in Ziploc baggies to hang on it. Students in need of any items can simply remove them from the wall and put them right to use!

Plans for scheduling the HCC volunteer readers for the story time that is offered all summer at Shaker parks continue. Five Shaker congregations share the rotation so children can hear stories each week. Our former thrift store volunteers have devoted time to gathering new and gently used children's books to give away to each child who attends a story time session.

We are a busy group and oh so happy! Our release from the responsibilities of managing a building has allowed us to flourish in so many ways. Our study opportunities have increased with offerings weekly and we hold our sessions at Biggby's Coffee Shop on Shaker Square. We mix Bible study with topics studies and we have even attracted some community participants when they have overheard our lively and timely discussions on social justice issues. We seem to be on the path that God has laid open before us and we are certainly enjoying the journey!

What are your hopes and dreams for our future together? What might God be up to in this next chapter of our story? How might we be called into something new?