

VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of boldness” 1st Timothy

It is the responsibility of the church in each generation to reclaim the ancient faith and to make it our own. Old South Church in Boston embraces this task in the early part of the 21st century with a thrilling sense of the Holy Spirit’s winds filling our sails and propelling us toward God’s future.

On Sunday, December 5, 2010 we held a Special Meeting of the Members for the purpose of considering the *Vision for the 21st Century*. We had prepared for this time of decision and discernment in prayer, presentations and holy conversations. The questions before the members were these:

- 1) Are we called to the *Vision for the 21st Century* as our guidepost through our 350th anniversary in 2019?
- 2) If so, do we covenant with God and with one another to breathe life into *Vision for the 21st Century* with the purpose of advancing it from aspiration to realization?

Both motions were passed in the affirmative, with no dissenting votes. It is now our joy and delight to begin to live into this call. God help us!



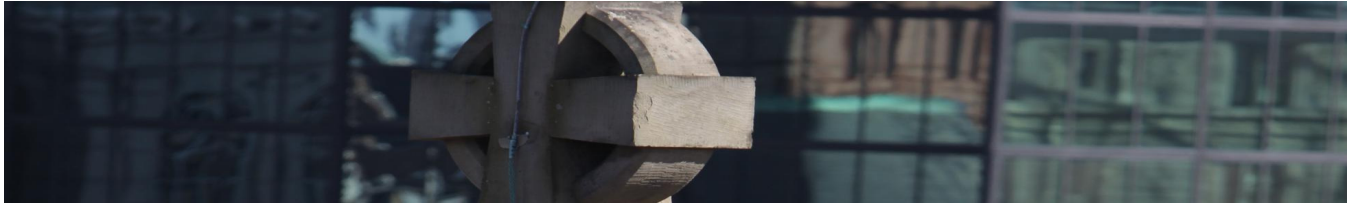
PRAYER FOR GOD’S GUIDANCE AND FOR GOD’S STILL-SPEAKING VOICE

Eternal God, Ancient of Days: you have watched over this congregation through more than three centuries of tumult and progress; you have guided us through the making of a new nation, through bloody wars, economic crises and struggles for civil and human rights; you have comforted us through storms and illness, and mentored and challenged us at times of great national decision. We give you thanks for forebears whose lives have been true, lovely and brave, whose stories we tell, whose memories we cherish, and by whose courage and faith we are inspired.

As we embark upon the Vision you have placed before us, keep our ears tuned to your still-speaking voice, our hearts open to your tip-toed entrance, our souls quickened by your Holy Spirit, and our discipleship true to the way and cause of Christ. Grant us strength and perseverance, wisdom and kindness toward one another. Kindle in our souls the fires of your justice, and make glad our hearts in the doing of this work. Amen.



SANCTUARY *IN* THE CITY



“Behold, I have set before thee an open door.” – Revelation

We are open spiritually:

Here we gather for the most elemental and formative work of the Church: worship. In God’s presence we are shaped by honest worship, formed for service, practiced in love and equipped for ministry. For here meets a vibrant and diverse congregation, deeply engaged in the Christian life.

We are open intellectually:

Here we exercise the spiritual and intellectual curiosity of our forebears. Eager to learn, we are open to being changed and transformed.

We are open physically:

Here is space for grace. This House of God is free and open seven days a week for meditation, prayer, beauty and respite: a place of calm and sacredness, refuge and hospitality in the midst of hustle and noise.

THE STATE TO WHICH WE ASPIRE

Warning! To enter into the life of this people of God is to encounter God’s soul-challenging, life-changing, radicalizing love. At worship, in service and in community we are formed and informed by the Gospel. Having been met and changed by Jesus, we are readied and commissioned for service in the world.

Humbled by the vast mystery of God and thus engaged in deep and authentic spiritual inquiry, we are widely known as a Christian people whose practice of intellectual freedom offers a sanctuary from the absolute claims of religious fundamentalism.

Bursting with the Good News of God’s unbounded love, each of us is living our call to share the Gospel in word and deed. The joy, hope and meaning-making that radiate from this place and people are filling our church school, swelling our choirs, deepening our mission and enlivening our community. Growing by 7% each year, we are 1,200 members by 2019.

To accommodate a growing congregation, burgeoning programs and mission we are optimizing every inch of this space. Our renovated Undercroft and refitted facilities enable 21st century ministries. We are media-equipped and savvy. Mid-day concerts, forums and interest groups create a buzz that draw people from far and wide.

Our experience of the myriad ways in which music touches us and opens a window to God, has inspired us to establish an edgy Arts Ministry. Visual and performance arts enliven and provoke us to greater discipleship.

We excel at the art of communicating the ways in which our venerable past informs our present & challenges us toward God’s future. Exploiting technologies and visual media, visitors experience the presence of God and strangers see past a daunting building to a vibrant congregation.

Reaching out with God’s love, accommodating newcomers and making this ancient faith ever fresh, we have introduced three additional weekly worship services.

CHRISTIANS *IN* FORMATION



**“Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” – Paul**

We are formed spiritually:

Here we are formed by God to transform the world. Through the arts of prayer and service, of theological and biblical inquiry, and as recipients of God’s radical love known through Jesus, we are equipped to communicate that all—regardless of race, ethnicity, creed, class, age, gender, marital status, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...are made in the image of God.

We are formed intellectually:

Drawing upon the best of Christian tradition, ancient and modern, we are internalizing the source of Dr. King’s courage, Bishop Tutu’s kindness and Mother Theresa’s strength while pursuing our own call to justice and mercy.

We are formed physically:

Called to love God “with all our heart, soul, mind and strength,” we are coached in the practice of our faith. Here we are formed for the Christian life; from here we form the world for Good and for God.

THE STATE TO WHICH WE ASPIRE

As Christianity in the 21st century experiences upheaval and undergoes a radical sea change, we are on the leading edge. We are testing, probing, experimenting, asking: “How does the gospel live in each of us today?” and “How does the Gospel’s radical, world-transforming news find a hearing in an age of media?”

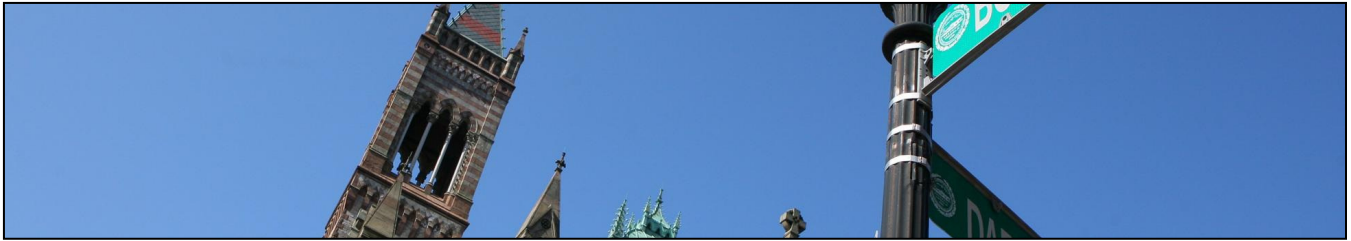
Our experiential curricula developed for children, youth and adults (those new to the faith and life-long Christians), is forming and equipping each of us to live the Christian life and to speak of and from our faith with simplicity and confidence. In partnership with parents/caregivers we have implemented a developmental religious education plan for each child in our congregation.

A majority of us participate annually in a mission trip, service opportunity, retreat, immersion experience, interfaith or intercultural encounter, or transformative small group, fellowship or learning opportunity. We are serving others while exposing ourselves to transformation in the encounter with different cultures and peoples.

In any given year, 5% of us are in formal training to be Christian teachers, leaders, mentors, activists and witnesses.

Claiming our mission to the world and our covenantal relationship with the Church universal, we are both regularly and strategically drawing from and contributing to the life, energy and resources of the wider church and community. As a faith community and as individuals, we are immersing ourselves in the art of discipleship in the local, regional, national and global contexts.

FAITH AT THE CROSSROADS



“What does God require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” - Micah

At a spiritual Crossroads:

We believe that God inhabits the space between I and Thou and that all relationships are Holy. As Jesus worked at the boundaries between male and female, Gentile and Jew, slave and free, rich and poor, so do we take up our work in the contested crossroads of our day. While the world succumbs to hatred, suspicions and violence, we are learning the difficult and costly art of love.

At an intellectual Crossroads:

Our faith is 2000 years old, but our thinking is not. We deepen our own Christian faith and witness by exploring the intersections between science and religion, church and state, mind and body, history and the present. In faith we are challenged by the issues of the day and God’s call to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

At a physical Crossroads:

In part, ours is a ministry of place and circumstance. Located on a great city square, we minister at the intersections of Boston’s South End & Back Bay, center city & inner city, great affluence & greater need. From here we take our faith into our community and the world. From here we receive all who enter, offering resources for doing justice, practicing kindness and walking humbly with God.

THE STATE TO WHICH WE ASPIRE

Our prophetic voice and our individual acts of direct service, mission and social justice emerge from a disciplined practice of listening to God and acting in love and faith with regard to all we say and do.

We have earned a reputation for sacrificial service. Each of us uses our gifts for service to our neighbors, regardless of belief. We focus our resources on the needs of others, especially the poor. We work for justice for the powerless, the outcast, and those at the margins.

Claiming our role as an historic, leadership church we have a dynamic ministry of receiving pilgrims, welcoming worshippers and sharing the Good News through witness, mission and a public religious voice.

We have developed shared programs of education and fellowship with Jews and Muslims and other faith traditions in an effort to live in peace and harmony with persons of differing, even competing, world views.

We have regained our public ministry as a “mouth house” equipped to engage with the issues of the day from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian ethic, a commitment to the common good, care for the earth and a heart for the dispossessed. Reporters and academics seek our comments on the weighty issues of the day.