



**Channing Memorial Church**  
*Year of Decision 2006 – 2007!*



Report of the Channing Transition Team  
to the Governing Board and the  
Congregation on completion of the "Year  
of Decision"

May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007



# Channing Memorial Church

Year of Decision 2006 – 2007!



## Executive Summary

On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006 the Governing Board of Channing Memorial Church established the following goal:

*By June 2007, Channing Church has reached a consensus on a common vision for our ministry and our property that empowers the Congregation and its leadership to move in specific directions.*

The Board empowered an ad hoc committee called “The Transition Team” to develop a process and facilitate a Congregation-wide discussion leading to development of a consensus vision statement.

At the conclusion of the eight-month “Year of Decision” process, the Congregation developed a consensus vision statement, made a series of commitments to achieve that vision, and learned a great deal about our values and our needs, our desires, and our aspirations. The vision statement achieves the Board’s objective. By committing to “stewardship of our historic sacred spaces” the statement empowers church leadership to move forward with plans and initiatives to repair and sustain our Sanctuary. By committing to create “a wellspring of caring and compassion within a vital and caring community,” the statement empowers all of us to sustain and expand our programs to enrich our shared ministry throughout our lives. By committing to “peace, justice, and respect” and “positive change”, the statement empowers the Congregation to enlarge its role in the wider world.

*Believing that the true expression of our religion is the way we live our lives –*

*We, the members and friends of Channing Memorial Church, commit to use our diverse gifts in shared ministry as a catalyst for:*

*Creating a wellspring of caring and compassion within a vital and inspirational community of all ages that values individuals throughout their lives,*

*Spiritual growth and intellectual exchange,*

*The honest and responsible use of the democratic process,*

*Stewardship of our historic sacred spaces,*

*Peace, justice, and respect for all people and our planet,*

*Positive change within our community and the world.*

Concerted effort by the church leadership and by the Congregation as a whole will be required to maintain the momentum the “Year of Decision” process has fostered if we are to continue to move forward. To sustain this momentum to achieve our vision, the Transition Team recommends the following actions:

- A. The Congregation approves the vision statement and embraces it as its vision for the future of Channing Memorial Church.
- B. The Congregation approves and embraces the commitments made by the Focus Discussion groups to realize our vision and empower the Minister, Staff, Governing Board, and Church leadership to develop plans and take action to sustain our Sanctuary, develop our property, and expand and enrich our ministry within our community and the wider world.
- C. The Governing Board and Church Committees act on the empowerment given by the Congregation as a result of its vision and its commitments, moving forward in their areas of concern to achieve the vision of the Congregation. Among other things, the Governing Board should:
  - i. Establish a strategic planning committee in the 2007 – 2008 Church Year to develop a long-range plan to realize our vision. This plan should be a living document that is monitored and updated as required over the course of its implementation.
  - ii. Establish an ad hoc committee to evaluate our governance structure and propose specific changes that will provide for effective governance capable of implementing and assuring a strategic plan to realize our vision over a period of years.
  - iii. Establish resources and support for a Shared Ministry Oversight Committee, comprised of the Minister and select church leaders, to facilitate, coordinate, and evaluate our shared ministry efforts, in order to ensure healthy progress and balance in the church’s four areas of growth.
  - iv. Establish a Capital Fundraising Committee to explore capital fundraising options to repair, develop, and sustain our properties to best meet the needs of our growing community and expanding programs.
- D. The Governing Board provides an annual update to the Congregation at the Annual Meeting on implementation and assurance of these plans to ensure continuous ratification of the leadership’s actions.



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Year of Decision 2006 – 2007!



May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007

SUBJ: REPORT OF CHANNING TRANSITION TEAM ON ACTIONS COMPLETED DURING THE “YEAR OF DECISION”, 2006 - 2007

1. **Background.** Over the past several years, many members of Channing Memorial Church have recognized that our church is changing. Vital, active programs have brought new people through our doors with new ideas and different needs. This has increased the demand on volunteers and resources, forcing us to consider hiring more staff and raising more money to support the expanding needs of our Congregation. It has also forced us to confront whether we should strive to increase our membership to continue to infuse vitality into our Congregation and to expand the base of support for our programs. Finally, another and less positive change has been taking place around us. Our buildings continue to deteriorate, forcing us to ask ourselves whether we want to commit the time and resources to repair and improve our properties.

As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that major decisions about the future and direction of our Congregation should be founded on consensus among ourselves. To answer these questions and move forward, our Congregation’s leadership decided we needed a vision of our future that reflects such a consensus.

2. **Action Taken By the Governing Board.** On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the Governing Board of Channing Memorial Church established the following goal:

*By June 2007, Channing Church has reached a consensus on a common vision for our ministry and our property that empowers the Congregation and its leadership to move in specific directions.*

The Board empowered an ad hoc committee to develop a process whereby the Congregation would articulate this vision. This committee, called “The Transition Team”, was comprised of the Rev. Amy Freedman and the following Channing Members: Bill Peresta, Christine Laudon, Holly Grosvenor, Marsha Francis, Barbara Nowicki, Maryellen Doherty, and Tom Beall. The Transition Team developed an eight-month process to engage the Congregation in a series of discussions leading to development of a vision statement.

3. **The “Year of Decision” Process.** Early-on, the Transition Team settled upon a [process](#) involving four Congregation-wide discussions (called “Focus Discussions”) and a month-long period of reflection on the implications of growth and change (called “The Month of Education”). As implemented, the “Year of Decision” process included the following:

- **Leadership Meeting – October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006:** This was a meeting of Church Officers, Governing Board Members, Committee Chairs and Past Presidents to discuss, evaluate, and sanction the process the Transition Team developed to facilitate the Congregation-wide discussion. [The church’s leadership empowered the Transition Team to implement the process.](#)
- **Focus Discussion #1: Identifying Our Shared Values and Expressing Our Vision for Channing’s Ministry Based on Those Values – November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006:** At this meeting, approximately 60 members and friends considered questions concerning what we value as a Congregation and what our needs and aspirations are for the future. [The common themes derived from this discussion laid the foundation for the remainder of the “Year of Decision”.](#)
- **Month of Education.** During January 2007, church committees explored their individual visions for the future, the resources necessary to achieve those visions, and the implications of failure to meet the challenge of change. [The results of these committee discussions were provided to the Congregation to set the stage for the next Focus Discussion.](#)
- **Focus Discussion #2: Understanding Growth and the Relationship Between Wants and Resources – February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007:** At this discussion, approximately 30 members and friends considered the [four different types of church growth and the degree to which Channing is experiencing them.](#) Participants then [evaluated three potential future scenarios for Channing in terms of desirability and the resources necessary make them a reality:](#)
  - Return to the size of ten years ago.
  - Remain the same – no change.
  - Grow to approximately double our size.
- **Focus Discussion #3: Finding Where We Want to Align Wants and Resources – March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007.** At this meeting, the Transition Team provided the results of an [analysis of the feasibility](#) of realizing the needs, desires and aspirations the Congregation had expressed in the process thus far. With the insights provided by the analysis, approximately 40 members and friends [answered a series of questions](#) concerning willingness to provide the resources necessary to achieve these needs, dreams, and aspirations.
- **Focus Discussion #4: Crafting Our Vision.** Following a [recap of the “Year of Decision” process](#) by the Transition Team, approximately 40 members and friends developed a vision statement that reflects the needs, desires, and aspirations expressed during the “Year of Decision” and the commitments made to achieve them.

4. **Results.** At the conclusion of the “Year of Decision” process, the Congregation developed a consensus vision statement, made a series of commitments to achieve that

vision, and learned a great deal about what we all value and our needs, desires, and aspirations. The vision statement achieves the Board’s objective. By committing to “stewardship of our historic sacred spaces”, the statement empowers church leadership to move forward with plans and initiatives to repair and sustain our Sanctuary. By committing to create “a wellspring of caring and compassion within a vital and caring community,” the statement empowers all of us to sustain and expand our programs to enrich our shared ministry throughout our lives. By committing to “peace, justice, and respect” and “positive change”, the statement empowers the Congregation to enlarge its role in the wider world.

**A. Vision Statement:**

*Believing that the true expression of our religion is the way we live our lives –*

*We, the members and friends of Channing Memorial Church, commit to use our diverse gifts in shared ministry as a catalyst for:*

*Creating a wellspring of caring and compassion within a vital and inspirational community of all ages that values individuals throughout their lives,*

*Spiritual growth and intellectual exchange,*

*The honest and responsible use of the democratic process,*

*Stewardship of our historic sacred spaces,*

*Peace, justice, and respect for all people and our planet,*

*Positive change within our community and the world.*

**B. Commitments to Achieve the Vision.** These commitments were expressed during “Year of Decision” Focus Discussions. They express the desire of the Congregation to achieve our needs, desires, and aspirations and the commitment to provide the time, talent and resources to do so.

- i. We are committed to creating and sustaining a foundation for our children which fosters their spiritual growth, guides their search for truth and empowers them to work for justice.

Source: [Religious Education Mission Statement](#)

- ii. We are committed to promoting greater love and understanding among ourselves, in our community, in our country, and in the world.

Sources: [Rev. Amy Freedman's Sermon on "Vision and Change"](#), [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Religious Education Committee Talking Points](#), [Social Justice Committee Talking Points](#).

iii. We are committed to the exploration of spirituality by each individual.

Sources: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Religious Education Committee Talking Points](#), [Worship Talking Points](#).

iv. We are committed to reaching out to and serving others in our community, our country, and the world.

Sources: [Rev. Amy Freedman's Sermon on "Vision and Change"](#), [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Social Justice Committee Talking Points](#).

v. We are committed to fostering a shared ministry among our Minister, Staff, and Congregation to facilitate individual ministry and realize ministry together.

Sources: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Worship Talking Points](#).

vi. We are committed to maintaining and perpetuating this church as a memorial to the life and teachings of the Reverend Doctor William Ellery Channing, the founder of American Unitarianism, in Newport, Rhode Island, the town of his birth.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #3](#).

vii. We are committed to providing welcoming space to support and promote our church's ministry and programs for those within the congregation and beyond.

Sources: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Fellowship Committee Talking Points](#), [Membership Talking Points](#), [Religious Education Committee Talking Points](#), [Worship Talking Points](#)

viii. We are committed to finding and providing the resources necessary to realize our vision.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #3](#).

ix. We are committed to practicing Congregational polity; coming together in a spirit of friendship and love to forge consensus on important decisions and then empowering our Minister, our Staff, and our Lay Leaders to take action to implement those decisions and realize our vision.

Sources: [Results of Focus Discussion #3](#).

**C. What We Have Learned and Reaffirmed.** Throughout the “Year of Decision” process, we learned new things about ourselves and reaffirmed what we already knew. The self-examination we performed together made it possible to articulate our vision and make the commitment to realize it.

i. We have learned what we value about Channing.

- Being part of a loving, caring community.
- Spirituality.
- Respect for a diversity of beliefs.
- The freedom to believe.
- Fellowship.
- Service to others.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#)

ii. We have learned why people come to Channing.

- Spirituality / Inspiration.
- Community / Caring / Fellowship.
- Action / Outreach.
- Sacred Space / Music.
- Diversity of beliefs / Shared values.
- Growth and learning.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#)

iii. We have learned that the Congregation values our Minister and all she brings to our shared ministry.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Worship Talking Points](#), [Governing Board Talking Points](#).

iv. We have learned that the Congregation and our Minister value the programs offered at Channing and would like to see them expanded.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Social Justice Committee Talking Points](#), [Rev. Amy Freedman’s Sermon on “Vision and Change”](#), [Social Justice Committee Talking Points](#), [Worship Talking Points](#), [Small Group Ministry Talking Points](#), [Religious Education Committee Talking Points](#), [Music / Choir Talking Points](#).

v. We have learned that the Congregation and our Minister want Channing's presence and activity in the wider world (outreach) to grow.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1, Social Justice Committee Talking Points, Rev. Amy Freedman’s Sermon on “Vision and Change”](#).

- vi. We have learned that the Governing Board and leaders of key committees feel that they do not have the time or resources to sustain programs and outreach at their current level, let alone to provide for the growth the Congregation desires. More resources such as additional staff, better governance and leadership development, more pledges, and perhaps more active members are required.

Source: [Governing Board Talking Points, Social Justice Committee Talking Points, Religious Education Committee Talking Points, Results of Focus Discussion #2](#).

- vii. We have learned that some are concerned that our community will experience a loss of intimacy if we get too big too fast.

Source: [Governing Board Talking Points](#).

- viii. We have learned that the issue of repair, upkeep, and maintenance of our property and then what to do with it / how to use it dominates other discussions.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#).

- ix. We have learned that most people value our Sanctuary as a sacred space and / or as a memorial and historic building that should be preserved.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#).

- x. We have learned that the question of maintaining our space and its utilization appears to be a key issue within the Congregation.
  - a. Some find the challenge of maintaining all of our buildings, including the Sanctuary daunting and are unsure how we could afford or how we would go about repairing and sustaining our buildings.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #2](#).

- b. Some have advocated divesting ourselves of some of our space to raise funds to redevelop remaining space for Congregation use.

Source: [Presidents’ Task Force Report](#).

- c. A number of committees have indicated the desire or need for more space to sustain and enrich growing programs.

Sources: [Religious Education Committee Talking Points](#), [Fellowship Committee Talking Points](#), [Social Justice Committee Talking Points](#).

- d. Many believe that we devote too much of our time and / or resources to property issues.

Source: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#),

- xi. We have learned the extent of our property repair challenges and the projected costs of repair.

Sources: [On-site / Insight Capital Needs Assessment](#), [Stained Glass Condition Survey](#), [2004 Steeple Condition Assessment](#).

- xii. We have learned that there is outside support (to some degree) to repair and sustain our Sanctuary as evidenced by the \$272,000 in grants we received this year. We also know that we could be eligible for more grants especially if we demonstrate commitment to sustaining our Sanctuary (although to what extent is unknown).

Sources: [Finance Committee Talking Points](#), [Property Committee Talking Points](#).

- xiii. We have learned that many different possibilities exist for our property and space, such as those identified in the Presidents' Task Force report as well as many creative ideas voiced in our Focus Discussions.

Sources: [Results of Focus Discussion #1](#), [Results of Focus Discussion #2](#), [Presidents' Task Force Report](#).

- xiv. We have learned that addressing our property challenges is financially feasible but will require a long-term commitment of time, energy, and financial resources (a combination of the Congregation's and the larger community's).

Sources: [Feasibility Analysis Performed by the Transition Team](#).

**5. Recommendations.** A number of people have expressed concern that, having articulated the vision, we will now leave it on a shelf to gather dust, we will be no further ahead than before, and that all of this work will be for nothing. These are legitimate concerns. Concerted effort by the church leadership and by the Congregation as a whole will be required to maintain the momentum this process has fostered and continue to move forward. To sustain this momentum to achieve our vision, the Transition Team recommends the following actions:

- A. The Congregation approves the vision statement and embraces it as its vision for the future of Channing Memorial Church.
- B. The Congregation approves the commitments made by the Focus Discussion groups to realize our vision and empower the Minister, Staff, Governing Board, and Church leadership to develop plans and take action to sustain our Sanctuary, develop our property, and expand and enrich our ministry within our community and the wider world.
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- D. The Governing Board provides an annual update to the Congregation at the Annual Meeting on implementation and assurance of these plans to ensure continuous ratification of the leadership’s actions.

Respectfully submitted by the Channing Transition Team,

Rev. Amy Freedman

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