

Vision Statement for a Conversation on a New Creation

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The landscape of the American Church is changing. In a day of declining attendance and individual disengagement from the traditional mainstream church, many good congregations feel increased pressure in maintaining the level of ministry they desire. We envision the unification of one or more likeminded congregations into a larger, stronger church embodying a progressive gospel in Austin.

Like the other congregations who might consider this partnership, the University Baptist Church has a rich history as a prophetic voice in Austin. In spite of consistent efforts in outreach, our membership has aged and declined. Fewer volunteers carry the same work load to the point of burnout. A smaller giving base makes our beautiful buildings a burden. Cultural changes in church participation across the country suggest this pattern will continue. While we have resources to continue at the same level of ministry for several years, we believe it is important to move in a new direction now out of intentional strength, rather than desperate weakness. Our mission to proclaim a Christian gospel that is positive, loving, inclusive, and true to scripture is more important than making an idol of the ways of the past. Faithfulness to God and the saints who have gone before us means that we take from the altars of the past not the ashes, but the fire.

Therefore, we are seeking a conversation with other congregations that might lead to partnership in a new community of faith combining the light of our good histories into a new and brighter beacon. Our non-negotiables stem from our deepest commitments:

1. Christian identity with a mission to embody the way of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Christian scripture.
2. Congregational polity where the people led by the Divine Spirit make decisions regarding the identity and functioning of the local church.
3. Progressive theology which sees the gospel as including all persons regardless of race, gender, orientation, or economic status and especially cares for the dispossessed.

All other aspects of the identity of the new community are on the table for discussion, including location and properties, denominational identities and affiliations, organization and staffing, and even name.

We recognize that letting go of what has been holy and precious to us in the past will be painful in each congregation, but we trust God to lead us into a new and even better future with a larger congregation and greater resources for a stronger witness to the gospel of Christ in the heart of Austin.