



*The Vision for
Old South Union Church*

Introduction

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Few churches in America have a history as rich and storied as that of Weymouth's Old South Union Church. For nearly 300 years, our congregation has faced times of celebration and mourning, confidence and self-doubt, outreach and introspection. Through the highs and lows and across the centuries, an unwavering faith in God and the teachings of Jesus have continued to lead the way forward.

Now, in a world that is rapidly changing, the congregation looks to establish its vision for the future. In doing so, we must answer some fundamental questions. How do we define ourselves as a congregation? What are our priorities? How do we practice and share our faith? How do we continue to attract new members, particularly younger ones? How do we best serve others? How do we find the right balance of innovative faith practices and beloved traditions? In short, *what role is God calling us to play in the lives of our members, our community, and our world?*

This vision is our roadmap to the future. Going forward, everything we do as a congregation should be held up to our vision. Do our actions align with who we say we are and who God is calling us to be as a church? For example, does a new worship service, new service project, or new Christian education opportunity align with the vision we've established for ourselves? If not, are we asking why not? Should our vision change? We view this vision statement as a "living document." It will not remain static, but rather will be revisited and revised periodically as we evolve and grow as a congregation.

With that, we put forth the four pillars of our vision. The first letters of the pillars clearly identify us as **O**ld **S**outh **U**nion **C**hurch:

- I. "O**pen** and Welcoming"
- II. "S**haped** by the Teachings of Jesus"
- III. "U**nited** in God's Love"
- IV. "C**ommitted** to Service"

I. Open and Welcoming

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

We hear it from long-time members and first-time guests alike. “This church is so friendly!” Indeed, we are enthusiastic in our love for God, our church, and each other. The risk, of course, is that we share that love with those we know well at the expense of new members or guests. While being outwardly open and welcoming to those we don’t know comes easily to some, for others, it’s hard work. We can’t rely on the same few members to be unofficial “greeters” at worship and church functions. We clearly have the personality as a congregation to *always* be open and welcoming, but we must maintain our focus on constantly and consistently sharing our joy in the love of God with all who enter our doors.

There are many ways through which we want to highlight how we are open and welcoming:

Old South welcomes the community to participate in the life of the church. We always welcome members of the community who wish to join us for all of our faith-based activities.

- Worship and music
- Youth Group
- Bible studies
- Mission trips
- Ministry teams
- Fellowship events

Old South offers sacred rites to those outside our congregation. A critical element of remaining open and welcoming is allowing members and guests alike to receive sacred rites within our church. We view this as fulfilling our duty to God.

- Communion
- Baptisms
- Weddings
- Funerals

Old South is an inclusive community. We do not discriminate; all are welcome at Old South. We demonstrate this by:

- Fostering an intergenerational community
- Balancing our respect for tradition with our desire for growth and innovation
- Performing marriage ceremonies for couples of any orientation or gender identity
- Sharing the good news of Old South through the “Pop-Up Church”

Old South sponsors community events. We believe it is important for the church to promote gatherings that bring people together to share in and celebrate our collective blessings.

- Pop-Up Pantry and Clothing Closet
- Spring luncheons
- Community suppers
- Harvest Fair
- Yard sales

Old South hosts outside organizations that need a place to gather. This is another way in which we open our doors to the community. Our hope is that, by entering our church, members of these organizations feel the presence of the Holy Spirit while engaging in their business and activities.

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Narcotics Anonymous
- The Boy Scouts of America
- The Fine Arts Chorale
- South Shore Hospital

II. Shaped by the Teachings of Jesus

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”
(Matthew 22:36-40)

We believe that Jesus sets the example for all of us on how to live our faith. Many of us received our first exposure to the ways and teachings of Jesus as children in Sunday School. As those memories fade over time, we commit ourselves to establishing opportunities for “continuing education” for our members and guests that allow us to re-learn – or learn for the first time – the lessons Jesus teaches us. The critical next step is to apply those teachings to our faith and the operation of our church. There are many opportunities for us at Old South not only to learn the ways of Jesus, but to live them out.

Old South incorporates the teachings of Jesus in worship, music, and prayer. We must continue to focus on ensuring that the lessons of Jesus are obvious and accessible to all as we gather together in worship. We are also committed to developing new and innovative avenues through which we can learn and grow in His teachings.

- Adult Choir
- Youth Choir
- New Worship Launch/Imagine Team
- Open Table

Old South is dedicated to providing children and adults with faith formation opportunities. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). We have long prided ourselves in providing children with age-appropriate opportunities to learn His teachings, and we dedicate ourselves to supporting adults on their journeys of faith.

- Sunday School
- Vacation Bible Camp
- Genesis Youth Group
- Confirmation Class
- Youth Group and Camp
- Adult Bible Studies
- Living Nativity

Old South lives the teachings of Jesus through thoughtful stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us. We have been given so much – an active and engaged congregation, a beautiful building, and, importantly, a solid balance sheet through years of prudent financial planning. However, sometimes the business of “running the church” can feel like it’s disconnected from our faith. We must commit to checking and rechecking that we are incorporating the teachings of Jesus as we manage our:

- Time and talents, including the work of our Boards, Committees, and Ministry Teams
- Financial resources
- Physical and human resources

Old South will stay rooted in Jesus’ teachings as we balance our respect for our history and tradition while discerning our future. We know the rapidly changing dynamics afoot in today’s world may force us to adapt if we want to remain a healthy and vibrant congregation. However, change can be hard. We must stay grounded in Jesus’ teachings as we work together, hand in hand, to find the right balance of innovative faith practices and beloved traditions.

III. United in God's Love

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.
(1 John 4:11-12)

We feel it as we walk through the doors of our building. We feel it as we greet, meet, and worship with others. And we feel it as we spread our faith beyond our walls. We are united in God's love. This is the bedrock of who we've been as a congregation and who we will become. Yet, it's easy to take this for granted. It's just *there*. We must commit ourselves to stating openly and celebrating that God's love unites us.

Old South is united in God's love through worship. Worship has long been the primary venue through which we celebrate God's love for us. As we move forward, we must continue to ensure that, no matter what form worship takes, it serves to unite us in that love.

- Music
- Sacraments
- Our congregation's tradition of blessings

Old South is united in God's love through fellowship. As worship implies a certain level of formality, we must continue to join together to be united in God's love in less-formal settings.

- Rally Sunday
- Fellowship events (e.g. all-church picnic, golf tournament)
- JOY Club
- Small group ministries (e.g. yoga, board games, hiking)

Old South is united in God's love through prayer. When we come together cloaked in God's love, powerful things can happen. We support and nurture each other through prayer.

- Prayer in worship, including blessings and commissionings
- Healing prayer
- Prayer chain
- Prayer shawls and baptismal blankets

Old South is united in God's love through pastoral and congregational care. We all have times of need. Our pastors and our members commit to caring for others, whether within our congregation or outside of it, through God's love.

- Pastoral care and counseling
- Hospital visits
- Visits to homebound members, including home communion
- Responding to community crises

IV. Committed to Service

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”
(Matthew 25:37-40)

At Old South, we believe that service is an important act of faith. Jesus taught us to help and serve others, and we must consistently look to strengthen our existing service opportunities while keeping our eyes open for new ones. We must regularly ask ourselves, “Are we doing all we can – and then some – to help those in need?”

Old South serves our own. We are a church that is led by its pastors, but run by its members. In order to operate in this fashion, we need volunteers and lots of them. We must make it easy and exciting to serve the church, and work to focus our resources and efforts where they are most needed and not necessarily within a rigid organizational framework.

- Boards and Committees
- Ministry teams
- Crafty Helpers
- First Monday group
- Church Improvement Projects (CHIPS)

Old South serves our community. We are a community church, and we engage with members of our community in a spirit of faith. We are committed to helping those in our community with personal hardships and struggles and those of lesser means. Our goal is to help our community reach its God-given potential and to make it a great place to live, work, and practice our faith.

- Pop-Up Pantry and Clothing Closet
- The Food Pantry Garden of Weymouth
- Volunteering at Father Bill’s
- Deacon’s Fund/holiday outreach
- Donations of financial resources and needed items to local organizations
- Sunday School and Youth Group donations
- Homelessness Team
- Opioid Crisis Team
- Relay for Life

Old South serves our nation and the world. At Old South, we look beyond our four walls and beyond our community. The needs are so great in so many areas around the globe that it can be overwhelming, but over the years we’ve proven that we can be a resource and spread God’s love as we serve those in need nationally and internationally.

- Annual Pennsylvania mission trip
- Annual Ecuador mission trip
- Youth Group mission trip
- Donations of financial resources to national organizations
- Special collections for national/international disaster relief

In Summary

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Setting forth a vision for the future is never easy, particularly as the world around us feels like it's undergoing such rapid change. Faith and religion face new challenges as people struggle with their beliefs, how best to allocate their time, and new and growing skepticism around institutions of all kinds. While Jesus' teachings stand the test of time, in order to thrive and grow, it's becoming quite clear that churches and congregations need to evolve. However, at the same time, a church must achieve the right balance between growth and evolution, and honoring its history and traditions. Said a different way, a congregation has to decide what to change and what to leave alone.

Going forward, we commit to using this document to help us be accountable to our faith and for our actions as a congregation. Whether we are honoring tradition or trying something new, are we acting as our vision states we will? Our vision should excite us and challenge us at the same time. It must be a living document, not subject to comprehensive revisions every year, but modified as the congregation's needs and priorities evolve.

We can't wait to see what God has in store for Old South Union Church!

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