

# Cedar Ridge Plan: September-November 2020

## August 2020

### Our Vision

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."  
Jesus (Luke 4:18-19)*

At the heart of our vision is a dream and a longing for healing and wholeness. God is love and we all long to be and feel loved. It's the very ground of our being: life is a quest for infinite union with infinite love; oneness with God where we experience complete, unconditional acceptance and peace. This is not just an individual dream—we long for the oneness of all humanity. Deep down, we know we all belong to one another. Everyone bears the divine image; we are all sacred. We are all God's children, all sisters and brothers who belong to one another and belong to God. Our dream is that our world would become the "beloved community" where we are all different, but all truly one.

But we live in a society torn apart by fear, injustice and oppression. White supremacy, economic exploitation, and ecological devastation fracture our shared humanity and deny the equal worth of all. As followers of Jesus, we seek to continue his mission of proclaiming good news to the poor and setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18), and of praying and working to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth (Matthew 6:10). Simultaneously, emotional and practical hardships related to the pandemic leave many of us feeling inadequate for the task.

The energy and dynamism for this mission will not come from our grit and determination, but from a renewed understanding of our very union with God. The same "Spirit of the Lord" that empowered Jesus, empowers us. Just as Jesus was "one with the Father," so too our oneness with God is the energy for our mission. Love is the beginning and Love is the end!

Therefore, our goal for the coming year will be to focus as a community on these two components of our vision: To work together for social justice, empowered by an ongoing experience of God's unconditional love.

### Responding in the Current Reality of Pandemic

In order to turn our vision into reality, we carefully plan ahead through a team-based leadership process. Normally we develop a plan for a whole year, but we are currently in some unique circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic means that many of our usual church activities and avenues are very restricted. Despite some loosening of restrictions, we still face a lot of uncertainty about the

future. So this year we will plan in smaller timeframes—initially just the first quarter from September to November.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents huge challenges to us as a community as we seek to love and serve the world. In addition to the impact felt on our own community, it has revealed afresh the abject inequity in our society. A commitment to the pursuit of racial and economic justice is not new to Cedar Ridge, and it will remain for us a priority beyond the scope of this planning period: We are in this for the long haul. But the impact of COVID-19 and the recent well publicized incidents of police brutality have heightened awareness of the systems of injustice in our society, exposed complicity, stimulated empathy, and strengthened momentum for change. We want to seize this opportunity to focus our efforts on strengthening our existing justice work (through the farm, Guatemala, our partnership with Greencastle, and education funding issues), and develop new corporate and individual initiatives to enable us to take action.

The pandemic has forced us all into a different rhythm of life, and given us an opportunity to reflect and look at things differently. In some ways this is limiting and disappointing. But it is also an opportunity for us to leverage the time to dig deeper personally and corporately with regard to our goal for the year. This includes doing the internal work of owning injustice and our involvement in it, and committing to change and action. It also means remembering that we are partnering with God in bringing hope and healing to our society. We share the work with Jesus, whose yoke is easy and burden is light (Matthew 11:29). Therefore, we will seek to draw on the strength and courage Jesus brings, setting aside intentional time to connect with God and take care of ourselves through prayer, rest and relaxation.

We share the work with one another too. Fighting injustice is too heavy a burden for any individual to bear alone—but we are not alone. We are in this together, and in the coming months, we will continue to seek to create a supportive, nonjudgmental environment, in which we can both challenge and encourage one another. We will seek to extend opportunities for honesty, vulnerability and mutual learning, and allow each other the time and space we each need to grow.

## Goal and Objectives

The goal for the year is to work together for social justice, empowered by an ongoing experience of God's unconditional love.

The first quarter (September-November) objectives that contribute to this goal are as follows:

1. Renew and recalibrate our commitment to social justice
2. Renew our spiritual lives, and revitalize our capacity and energy for our work

As we pursue these objectives, we will also remain responsive to changing needs caused by the pandemic both within and beyond our community.

## Metrics

In past years, we have used quantitative measures to indicate progress towards achieving the year's objectives. The current context is very uncertain—both in terms of future regulations and

recommendations regarding COVID, and the ability and willingness of community members to engage in-person and on-line, particularly as the school year recommences. Given this uncertainty, and the short timeframe of the plan, we will take more of an “evaluative monitoring” approach.

On a weekly basis, we will track two quantitative measures of community engagement: (i) tithes and offerings, and (ii) viewership of the Sunday worship service. During the month of November, pastoral staff will meet with each ministry area to discuss what steps have been taken to advance the two objectives listed above. This will allow us to evaluate progress in a timely manner to inform planning for the following quarter. At the beginning of next year (September 2021) we will conduct the second biannual analysis of the [strategic plan](#) metrics.

## Activities

To achieve the objectives listed above, the following set of activities is proposed for the next quarter, organized by level of activity, and recognizing current COVID restrictions and related resource constraints.

### Activities contributing to Objective 1: Renew and recalibrate our commitment to social justice

- Macro level
  - Look to partner where we can with larger coalitions and organizations that share our values for justice (such as the Poor People’s Campaign) to increase our impact and keep us rooted in a broader movement for justice.
- Church level
  - Develop a “learning leading to action” process for all our social justice initiatives:
    - Support existing teams and initiatives in this process
      - Continue the encounter group process of the Racial Justice Team (RJT)
      - Use the harvest service to focus on food justice
      - Apply the CRCC social justice guiding principles (see Appendix 1) to planning our work in Guatemala
      - Continue engagement with Greencastle Elementary and respond to their evolving priorities
    - Start teams and/or initiatives for other areas, as needed
    - Run live and/or virtual group gatherings to advance the process
    - Integrate all areas around common justice values
  - Integrate social justice objective across all areas through a process of reflection and collaborative planning
    - Work with CRK leaders, the RJT and others to define what level of racial justice understanding, awareness and agency we want kids to have at various ages
    - Work with Youth leaders to engage youth in churchwide content related to racial justice, and the work of the RJT
    - Integrate a justice focus into worship services and materials for discipleship groups
- Individual level
  - Inspire everyone to respond personally and locally
  - Create space for stories and a sense of camaraderie

## Activities contributing to Objective 2: Renew our spiritual lives and revitalize our capacity and energy for our work

- Model the way for contemplative prayer
  - Worship services
  - Discipleship groups
  - Biweekly outdoor gatherings for contemplative prayer, comprised of family-friendly prayer practices (one Saturday morning per month) and evening prayer practices (one Wednesday evening per month)
- Emphasize and encourage self-care as a non-selfish aspect of a loving community
  - Include self-care stories and practices in communications
  - Run low-key fun outdoor movie nights
  - Hold carefully supervised outdoor children activities as we are able, while ensuring safety
  - Hold outdoor youth activities
  - Hold yoga and other creative or relaxing outdoor activities
  - Hold a harvest celebration

In addition, we will reinvigorate our sense of community through the following:

- A socially-distanced church gathering on Saturday Sept 12 to launch the new plan
  - This hour-long event will be held twice, at 3Pm and 5PM the same afternoon, with attendance capped at 50 people, and pre-registration required (a third timeslot will be added, if needed)
  - Content will include a fun ice-breaker activity, presentation of the quarterly plan, an opportunity for community sharing, and prayer
- Transmit pre-recorded services live over zoom on Sunday mornings to allow real time community interaction
- Make CRK online services more of a “plug and play” to minimize required parents/caregivers engagement to allow them an opportunity to focus on the adult content
- Continue farm nights until mid-October
- Hold a Journey course in person outdoors or via zoom (depending on participant preferences)

## Upcoming Series

The series descriptions below are tentative and will be influenced by a number of factors, including current events, cultural pressures, and community responses to previous series.

### Fall series

At a time when we cannot meet together as previously—when we cannot sing together, take communion together, serve alongside each other, eat together, or hug one another as we share in each others’ joys and sorrows—what does it mean to be a church community? Our current context is forcing us to reimagine what it means to follow Jesus together—but this process of reimagining is not unique to our present time. The church has been constantly evolving. Through this series, we will look at how the radically diverse community that Jesus formed struggled with practical needs, ethnic tensions, and the unpredictability of the Spirit. We will examine the desire for order and the dangerous allure of power and control. And we will ask ourselves how we can remain resolutely committed to the way of Jesus as a

prophetic, united community that overcomes physical separation and embraces demographic, personal and political diversity.

**Late fall series**

Drawing on last series, recognizing that the church is constantly learning. Embracing the humility to learn, and welcoming disruption as something with the potential to lead to new understanding and vibrancy. Featuring Ted Talks or podcasts of experts sharing practical tools for dealing with conflict, emotional overload, racial tensions, etc.

**Draft Calendar**

Date	Event	Notes
Mon Aug 31	Back to school for MCPS & PGCPs	Virtual only; HCPSS on Tues Sept 8
Sat Sep 5	Yoga & Meditation	9-10AM
Sun Sep 6		Labor Day weekend
Sat Sep 12	Churchwide "re-launch" event	3PM and 5PM
Sun Sep 13	Fall series 1	
Fri Sep 18	Movie Night 1	
Sun Sep 20	Fall series 2	
Sat Sep 26	All Ages Prayer Practices	10AM outdoors on the property
Sun Sep 27	Fall series 3	Journey 1—4:30PM outdoors/online
Fri Oct 2	Movie Night 2	
Sun Oct 4	Fall series 4	Journey 2—4:30PM outdoors/online
Wed Oct 7	Evening Prayer Practices	7PM outdoors on the property
Sun Oct 11	Harvest service—food justice focus/activity	Journey 3—4:30PM outdoors/online
Sat Oct 17	All Ages Prayer Practices	10AM outdoors on the property
Sun Oct 18	Late fall series 1	
Sun Oct 25	Late fall series 2	Annual Meeting (TBC)
Sun Nov 1	Late fall series 3	Time of prayer for the nation (pre-election)
Tue Nov 3	Election Day	
Wed Nov 4	Evening Prayer Practices	7PM outdoors on the property
Sun Nov 8	Late fall series 4	
Sun Nov 15	Late fall series 5	
Sun Nov 22	Thanksgiving Service	Thanksgiving on 11/26
Sun Nov 29	Advent 1	AAT

## Appendix 1: Integrated Vision for Social Justice

### What We Do and Why We Do It

As followers of Jesus, we recognize that we are one with God and therefore with one another. Systems and situations that oppress or exploit people are an aberration of our intimate connection to one another in God.

Concern for social justice—locally, nationally and internationally—has always been part of Cedar Ridge’s identity. Our vision calls us to work as agents of love, peace and hope; to serve our neighbors, care for the poor, and help the oppressed; to live simply and ethically, and treasure the earth; and to reach out beyond global, cultural and political barriers to offer friendship and practical support. We are welcoming and affirming of all gender and sexual identities. Our concern is for justice in all its forms, including racial, economic and ecological justice.

While our concern is for justice writ large, we recognize that resource limitations (including the time constraints of staff and volunteers, and the size and competing interests of our community) mean we can corporately engage only in a relatively few areas at any one time. Concern for social justice currently provides the impetus to

- Hold churchwide Days of Service, as well as maintain ongoing service projects
- Operate the farm and partner with Manna Food Center
- Partner with people in Ipala, Guatemala
- Engage in learning and dialogue around race
- Support local public schools (with a focus on Greencastle Elementary) through advocacy and practical assistance
- Contract with a company to establish a solar farm on the property

Two focus areas that overlap with several of these initiatives are food security and equity in education.

**Food security**—One of the most common pictures of the Kingdom of God in Scripture is of a banquet, where everyone shares in the abundance. In contrast, we live in a world driven by profit, that wastes a third of the food that is grown, and denies sustenance to the poor and vulnerable. Food insecurity is a widespread and growing problem in our county. We address this issue through our work on the farm, the Greencastle Elementary School backpack program, and temporarily, in response to the pandemic, food distribution in Ipala. This work is currently more associated with the direct delivery of food to those in need than to education and activism around the root causes of hunger and malnutrition.

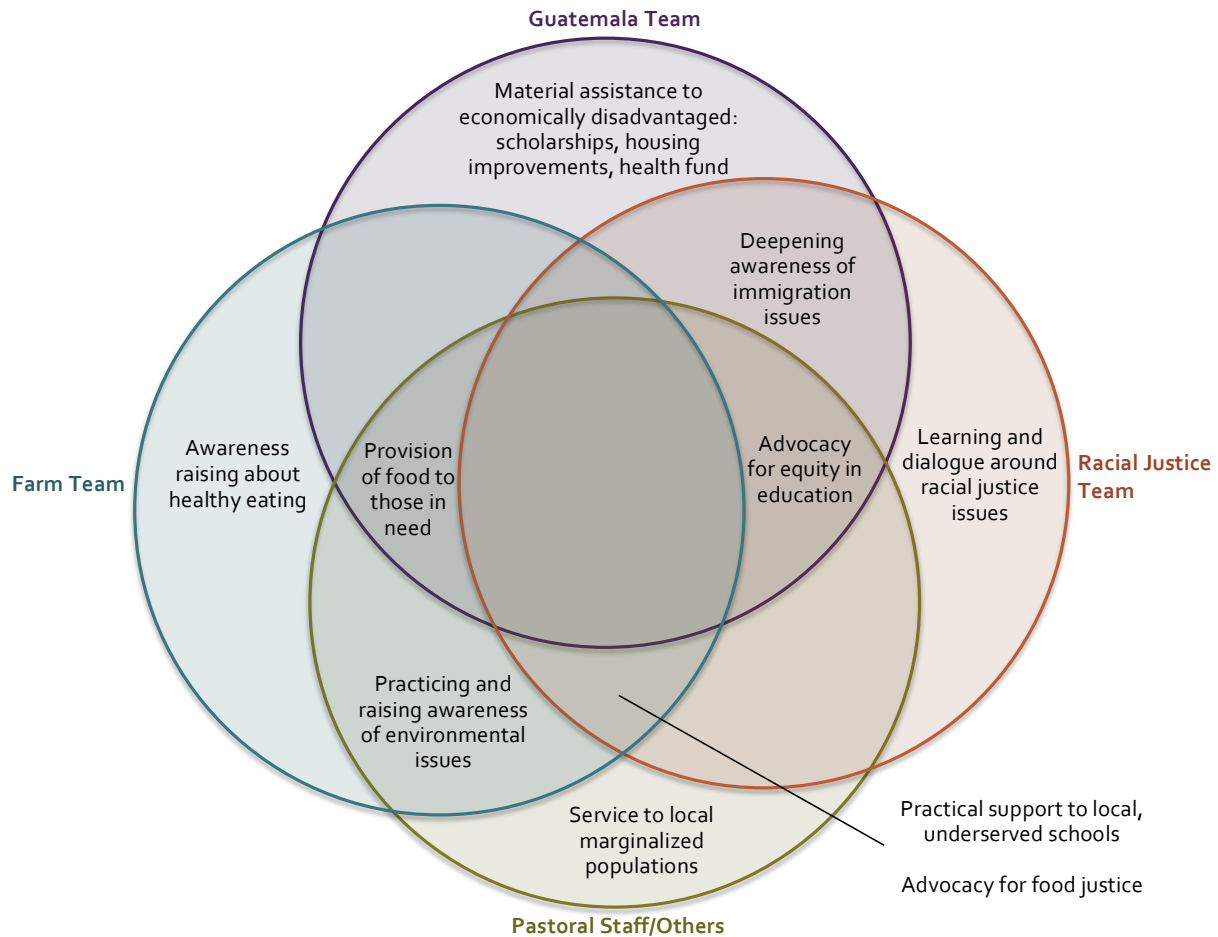
**Education**—There is significant segregation in local public schools, with low-income students and students of color largely concentrated in under-resourced schools that offer far fewer opportunities for student advancement than their predominantly white, middle class counterparts. Furthermore, in-school and out-of-school factors—including concentrated poverty—can compromise students’ physical, social and psychological wellbeing, which in turn creates barriers to learning. To address this disparity, we have engaged in interfaith and advocacy work, and partnered for many years with

Greencastle Elementary School. Internationally, we provide scholarships and support to schools in Ipala, Guatemala.

### Teams and Areas of Activity

Currently, three long-standing teams guide our work in these areas: the Farm team, Guatemala team, and Racial Justice team. Other initiatives (support to Greencastle, service projects, documentary screenings, solar development, etc.) are organized and led by pastoral staff and other community members. Potential areas of overlap or collaboration among the teams are shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: Potential areas of collaboration



### The Principles That Guide Our Work

The following principles were articulated through the strategic planning process.

**Justice focus:** We believe that the Kingdom of God looks like a just world where all of society experiences peace and healing. In keeping with the prophetic spirit of Jesus, we long to see justice prevail. Marginalization and oppression denies the Divine image we all bear, and breaks the heart of God. We are all called to stand alongside our sisters and brothers in the cause of justice.

***Respect for the dignity and agency of all:*** We gratefully embrace the boundless mercy of Jesus, who touched outcasts, healed foreigners, declared the meek blessed, and identified himself with the hungry, homeless, sick and imprisoned. We recognize our own need for mercy, and we seek to uphold the voice, dignity and agency of all, particularly those who are often marginalized.

***Humble acknowledgement of our role in supporting injustice:*** We approach social justice issues with humility and repentance, acknowledging our complicity in systems of oppression. We recognize that change must begin with us.

***Dependency on prayer:*** In all the busyness of organizing and “doing,” we remember that God is already at work, and we surrender to God’s transforming presence in us, as well as in our world.

***Honest and mutually accountable relationships:*** We are “all in this together.” Our focus is not on impersonal activities or one-off transactional interactions, but on meaningful, ongoing relationships through which we can grow, serve and experience community.

***Local partnerships:*** We do not presume that we have all the answers to injustice, or the ability to “solve” these issues. We are grateful for the opportunity to join with others in God’s work of reconciliation through ongoing partnerships.

***Integrated set of activities:*** All our various initiatives should flow from the same understanding of what social justice means to us as a community. We want our actions to be consistent in their values and operating principles, coordinated and mutually reinforcing.

***Churchwide involvement:*** Social justice is central to the heart of the gospel and should be an integral part of discipleship at Cedar Ridge for people of all ages.



## Appendix 2: Assumptions and Contingencies for Practical Planning

### Assumptions

- Limited size outdoor gatherings continue to be allowed with social distancing
- Indoor gatherings remain limited throughout the fall
- Some members unable or unwilling to return
- Possible change in membership (loss of some members, some newcomers who are not connected, return of some former members who moved away)
- Potential for change in attendance patterns:
  - Initial surge in attendance at 10AM live transmission of Sunday service, possibly followed by return to preference for asynchronous; or
  - Slow start until people feel comfortable with the technology and find value in the interaction

### Contingencies

- Sunday services continue to be accessible online
- All activities designed to be compliant with social distancing restrictions
- No large-scale events (e.g., Harvest Festival, Burtonsville Day parade, etc.)
- We will revise these plans as needed in response to changes in the environment (state and county regulations regarding COVID), and as the feasibility of in-person gatherings and our community's willingness to attend is tested