

# **Discernment Process Guidelines**

**Presented by the  
Joint Discernment Teams of  
First Christian Church, Fremont &  
Niles Congregational Church, Fremont**

## **Discernment Process Guidelines** **FCC/NCC Discernment Team**

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### **Introduction**

Since November of 2006, members of the First Christian and Niles Congregational churches have been considering the following question:

“Is God calling us to merge and will this merger strengthen our ability to carry out God’s mission in the world?”

Although some progress has been made in several different areas during this time, the joint discernment team believes that the discernment process needs formal structure built around it to be more effective and maintain a sense of momentum and accomplishment.

The purpose of this document is to define a process by which the discernment team can move our congregations to consider the possibility of merger.

The primary objectives of this document are to:

- Describe an overall project management philosophy to apply to the discernment process
- Define a project scope or definition
- Identify Discernment Team members from both congregations
- Define progressive phases of the discernment “project”
- Accomplish the following for each phase:
  - Define clear objectives, steps, timelines, and costs
  - Submit periodic status reports from the team to respective Council/Board members and both congregations
  - Insert requests for decisions to be made by Council/Board and both congregations regarding if and when to proceed

### **Project Scope**

The scope of a project helps define its boundaries, expectations, and a framework to achieve the desired results. The proposed scope of the Discernment Project is:

Develop a joint Discernment Team empowered by both congregations to evaluate all pros, cons, concerns, and other considerations regarding the proposed merger of First Christian and Niles Congregational churches. The Discernment Team is not a decision making body but will (1) develop discernment process guidelines (this document), (2) perform all tasks outlined in the process guidelines, (3) conduct workshops to facilitate the decision making process, and (4) submit formal recommendations to both congregations throughout the project moving both congregations to an informed decision on whether or not to merge.

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**Discernment Team Members**

Listed below are the current team members from both congregations:

<b>First Christian</b>	<b>Niles Congregational</b>
Bruce Kieft	Alta Jo Adamson
Alison Kieft	Will Feliciano
Dorletta Larsen	Dena Hokom
Liz Musgrave	Charlotte O'Donnell
	Steve Rosellini
Advisor:	Marilyn Singer
Joe Walters, Minister	Doug Swint
	Advisors:
	Jeff Spencer, Minister
	Bob Morris, Management Consultant

**Project Definition**

A. Phase 1 – Feasibility

**Objective:** To provide the congregations with information about the two congregations so the members of the congregations will be able to evaluate the feasibility of merging (determine if merging would strengthen our ability to carry out God's mission in the world) and decide as individual congregations if we should proceed with the discernment process.

**Steps**

1. Strength and Weakness Assessment
  - a. Engage each congregation in identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
  - b. Create a poster with post-its to allow members to add additional strengths and weaknesses.
  - c. Report identified strengths and weaknesses to the congregations.
2. Cultural Assessments
  - a. Conduct a Norms Identification workshop to identify the values and norms of the two congregations that define their respective cultures; report findings to congregations.
  - b. Create a list of objects in both churches to which individuals are emotionally and/or spiritually attached.

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3. Evaluate/Define Mission Statements
  - a. Conduct workshop to teach members of both congregations how to develop a mission statement (include one for each congregation and a merged version).
  - b. Publish a comparison of the mission statements.
4. Evaluate/Define Decision Making Process
  - a. Describe the current governance at both churches
  - b. Describe potential governance structures of a merged church
5. Perform Preliminary Financial Analysis
  - a. Create a budget comparison
  - b. Create assets and fund comparison
6. Publish current demographics of both congregations
7. Evaluate Religious Trends (in Fremont, Tri-Cities, and USA)
8. Help congregations decide whether to move to next phase
  - a. Answer the question, “Given what we’ve learned about ourselves and what we might be as a merged church, do we think it is *feasible*, and if so, should we proceed with our discernment process? (This is a different question from “Do we want to merge?”)

**Timeline:** Steps 1-7 completed at least one month prior to Special Congregational Meetings in both churches to complete Step 8. Special Congregational Meetings to be held not later than October 31, 2008

**Costs:** Lunch for norms identification workshop (\$500); Supplies (\$100)

**B. Phase 2 - Describing**

**Objective:** Based on the results of Phase 1 feasibility activities, describe what a merged church might look like.

**Steps**

1. Create preliminary description of what a marketing (evangelism) plan for a merged church might look like.

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2. Describe what a possible Governance Plan might look like.
3. Describe what a possible Financial Plan might look like.
4. Describe what a possible property plan for a merged church might look like.
5. Create a possible description of a merged church's mission statement
6. Describe possible staffing needs and what a staffing plan might look like.
7. Describe what a possible Implementation Plan might look like.
8. Help congregations decide whether to move to next phase
  - a. Answer the questions, "Would the potential new church described be more able to carry out God's mission in the world than the current configurations of two congregations? Is God calling us to become the described church?"

**Timeline:** Complete Steps 1-7 at least one month prior to Special Congregational Meetings in both congregations to complete Step 8. Special Congregational Meetings to be held by May 15, 2009.

**Costs:** Architect: preliminary drawings (TBD)

C. Phase 3 - Refining

**Objective:** To engage both congregations in refining the descriptions of Phase 2

**Steps**

1. Engage the Congregations in refining descriptions
2. Draft articles of incorporation, bylaws, etc. for a merged church
3. Engage Congregations in refining Implementation Plan
4. Vote on whether or not to merge. If the vote is yes, vote on whether or not to initiate the Implementation Plan.

**Timeline:**

**Costs:** Lawyer: (TBD)

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D. Phase 4 - Implementation

**Objective:** Execute Implementation Plan

**Steps:** To be defined by the adopted Implementation Plan

**Timeline:** To be defined by the adopted Implementation Plan

**Budget:** To be defined by the adopted Implementation Plan