

## Healthy Church Initiative Consultation Report First United Methodist Church, Atlantic Oct. 13, 2013

**Introduction:** It has been our privilege to work with the Rev. Lanette Plambeck, the staff, leaders, and congregation of the First United Methodist Church in Atlantic, Iowa. We appreciate the hospitality extended to the consultation team this week-end and all of the effort you invested to gather the information necessary prior to the consultation. Our prayer is that God will use the Healthy Church Initiative and the information contained in this report to encourage, equip and empower your congregation to continue to do great things for the sake of God's mission and to take your ministry to the next level as you transform lives in your congregation, community and beyond.

### **Strengths:**

- 1) History & Heritage:** Without shame and with boldness, this congregation has claimed its Wesleyan identity and United Methodist heritage. First United Methodist began as a place to minister to people who were not yet connected to Jesus Christ through the church, having a bold vision to care for and reach those who were being neglected or not well-cared for. First United Methodist continues to live out these passions through creative, relevant ministry in the local community.
- 2) Children's Ministry:** First United Methodist has a heart for children and the capacity and resources to invest. Both staff and laity are passionate and involved in growing this ministry which is a model for churches in this area.
- 3) Relational Culture:** First United Methodist is welcoming and friendly. People connected to this congregation have significant relationships with one another. Relationships are the primary entry point to the ministries and programs of the church. The Pastor and Staff model this relational style.
- 4) Willingness to serve when asked:** People connected to First United Methodist are willing to serve when asked. There seems to be a desire among people to find places to serve out of their giftedness and passions in order to make a difference in this community and beyond for the sake of Jesus Christ.
- 5) Outreach:** There is a strong desire within the congregation of First United Methodist to live into the mission of the United Methodist Church: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Examples of ministries outside of the walls include the PET Project, Heritage House, outreach to Cedar Park (block parties), Ministry with Soldiers, the Chuukese partnership, Dynamite Disciples, Celebrate Recovery, Vacation Bible School etc.
- 6) Strong, Passionate Leadership:** First United Methodist is blessed with strong, passionate clergy, staff, and lay leaders. Pastor Lanette's ministry is widely appreciated and seen as impacting the whole community, with particular care for the least, lost, last, over-looked, looked-through, and lonely.

### **Concerns:**

- 1) Vision:** While the people of First United Methodist are clear about their mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, there does not seem to be a *clear, compelling, shared* vision that propels the ministry of this congregation forward for the next five years and beyond as it lives out God's mission.
- 2) Participation:** At the present time, the ministry of the congregation is largely staff-driven and, at times, even staff-dependent. There are a relatively small number of people who are engaged in the mission and ministry of the church, doing more than attending worship. This hinders the sustainability of ministries and limits the opportunities for congregation members to respond to, develop and mature in their own areas of call, giftedness, and discipleship.

Because more people participate their way into commitment than commit their way into participation, involvement is a key component of making disciples.

**3) Communication:** There is need for more reliable and timely communication within the staff, between the staff and congregation, and within teams and the larger congregation. Information is often received "informally" through "one-on-one" communication and is sometimes "last minute."

**4) Worship:** First United Methodist offers two distinct worship services which give more people an opportunity to connect based on preferences for style and time. The second service, in particular, is in a time of transition. While considered "contemporary," much of the music is dated. There are some audio-visual challenges in both services that often distract worshippers by interrupting the flow of the worship. There are a number of other issues that compromise the overall quality of the worship experience, including but not limited to: sound quality, signage, and hospitality.

**5) Systems:** As a church grows and prepares to grow, there is a need to move from more informal to formal processes to ensure that people are ministered to and included in the ministries of the church. There is currently a reliance on informal processes while more intentional, organized structures for several key ministries—discipleship, leadership development, and care—are needed.

#### **Prescriptions:**

**1) Vision:** On the day this consultation report is accepted (should that be the case), this congregation will reaffirm "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" as its mission statement.

The congregation will have a day of prayer and preparation to seek God's vision for the ministry of First United Methodist. This will allow the members to be fully prepared for God's vision for the future. This day of prayer and preparation will be led by the coach or someone designated by the coach on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013.

The Coach will also conduct a day of visioning for the congregation. The purpose of this day is to dream of how God will lead this congregation into the future. This day will occur on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, will invite 3 participants out of the day of visioning to join her in drafting a vision for First United Methodist, built on the conversations and discernment of the "Day of Visioning." This draft will be presented to the Church Council for their approval on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

The Church Council will conduct an annual ministry audit, assuring that all ministries are aligned with the church's mission and vision. This Ministry Audit may utilize the DRIVE model. The first ministry audit will be completed by Charge Conference 2014. The primary resource would be Michael Slaughter's *Momentum for Life*.

**2) Participation:** Expanding participation is a way to live our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. More people participate their way into commitment than commit their way into participation. The younger and less-churched a person is, the more short-term and hands-on ministry opportunities need to be. To increase participation, the Church Council will:

- Identify one-time and short-term opportunities for ministry and communicate these opportunities to the congregation by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, and review and update this list regularly.
- Assist the congregation to move from a purely informational culture to an invitational culture by identifying a "host" in every ministry group, team or program (eg. Financial Peace University, Music Ministries, Bible Studies, Outreach Ministries, etc.) who is willing to extend an invitation to any and all who express an interest or desire to be engaged in that particular ministry. These hosts will be identified by March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and a list of hosts for all of the groups will be shared with the congregation.

- Schedule at least two ministry fairs annually to lift up ministry opportunities and help people connect.

Your coach, as well as the resource *Ultimately Responsible: When You're In Charge of Igniting a Ministry* by Sue Nilson Kibbey may be helpful to you in this process.

### 3) Communication:

**Internal and External Communication:** By January 1, 2014, Pastor Lanette, in consultation with the coach, will name a communication team of 3-4 people whose purpose is to examine, evaluate, and develop a clear communication strategy for First United Methodist. The team will examine how the church communicates the mission and vision with one another, and with the greater community. This will include, but may not be limited to, signage, announcements, examining bulletins, newsletters, emails, multi-media, social media, videos, bulletin boards etc. How clear are they? How can they be improved? The team will propose a strategy for communicating clearly and effectively. This strategy will be shared with the Church Council by April 1, 2014.

**Staff Communication** – The coach, in consultation with the pastor, will schedule a two-day, off-site staff retreat, with representation from the SPRC. This retreat will be facilitated by someone designated by the coach. Keeping the mission and vision before the group, the facilitator will help the staff identify, express, and clarify their key roles as staff, with attention to overlapping roles and how those are negotiated and identify opportunities for collaboration as well as what staff need to more effectively perform their duties. This retreat will be held by March 1, 2014. The results of this work will be shared with and approved by the SPRC and will be the basis for continuing accountability and support.

**Leadership Communication:** The Church Council is the primary steward of the vision. At its regular meetings, the Church Council will engage committee chairs in intentional sharing around how the church is living into the vision and the mission, asking questions such as:

- "What did you accomplish for the sake of the mission this past month?"
- "What did you try that didn't work as you hoped and what did you learn?"
- "What is God calling you to try this next month for the sake of the mission?"
- "What support do you need, and who might you partner with?"

The purpose of these regular conversations is so that the work of the church remains aligned with God's mission and vision for First United Methodist.

**4) Worship:** By January 1, 2014, Pastor Lanette, in consultation with the coach, will identify a team of 6-8 people to work with her to evaluate all aspects of the Sunday Morning Worship experience at First United Methodist with the goal of moving the worship experiences from "good enough" to "great!" This team will review and propose changes in both worship services to address the effectiveness of the flow of worship and transitions, accessibility (theological, cultural and structural), music, audio/visual technology, relationship with guests, the ease with which guests find their way into and around the church, and the capacity for making meaningful connections between existing worshippers and guests. In order to do this evaluation and planning, the team will:

- Study the suggested resource *Taking Flight with Creativity: Worship Design Teams that Work* by Len Wilson and Jason Moore.
- Evaluate the worship services at 3-4 churches, representing a variety of styles and communities, where worship is done with excellence.
- Present their dream for mission-based, vision-focused worship at First United Methodist to the Church Council by October 1, 2014, and fully implement this plan by the first Sunday of Advent 2014.

5) **Systems:** There are three systems that need attention.

**A. Intentional Discipleship Process**

By January 1, 2014, Pastor Lanette, in consultation with the coach, will identify a team of 3-5 people who will develop an intentional discipleship process for First United Methodist. The intention is to develop a plan to meet people where they are on the spiritual journey and invite them to take the next step in their relationship with Jesus. Special attention will be given to support people who are just beginning the Christian journey, and to nurturing those who want to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus Christ. The process will help people identify their spiritual gifts and find avenues for offering their gifts within the church and beyond. This team will also create resources to help guests navigate and understand life of a disciple in the United Methodist Church. The team will present the discipleship process to the Church Council by August 1, 2014, with implementation to begin September 1, 2014. Possible resources are: *Charting a Course of Discipleship* by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, and Jay Regennitter and *Deep and Wide* by Andy Stanley.

**B. Leadership Development**

By August 1, 2014, the pastor, in consultation with the Director of Discipleship, Lay Leadership and Nominations Team, the Service Ministry Team and the coach, will develop a plan for identifying, recruiting, training, and developing new leaders in the church and share their plan with the Church Council.

**C. Care**

By January 1, 2014, Pastor Lanette, in consultation with the coach, will name a team of 3-5 persons, plus the Pastor, the Director of Congregational Care and a representative of the SPRC to design a comprehensive, lay caring system to meet the needs of all who call First United Methodist home. There are already teams in place which are effective in providing care for those who are hospitalized, homebound, or in need of crisis-care. The task now is to expand the caring ministry to make sure that every household is connected to a care-coordinator who will be in quarterly communication with them, and tracking and following up on those whose worship attendance patterns have changed in order to discover caring opportunities which result from life transitions. The coach can provide resources for developing a lay caring ministry. The plan will be presented to the Church Council for approval by August 1, 2014 and implemented by September 1, 2014.

**CONCLUSION:**

We, the consulting team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation through this weekend consultation process. Our prayers and hope for your congregation is that God will use this process to help your church move to the next level in ministry for the sake of God's mission in the world.

**CONSULTATION TEAM:**

Jill Sanders, Lead	Melissa Drake, Coach	Jaye Johnson	Steve Peters
Sarah Stevens	Dean McPherson		

**Town Hall Meetings**

Sunday, October 20, at 10:00 a.m.  
Wednesday, October 23 at 6:30 p.m.  
Monday, October 28 at noon.

**HCI Church Conference**

Sunday, November 3 at 10:00 am in Fellowship Hall

**Annual Charge Conference**

Monday, November 4 at 7:00pm

CC: Rev. Brian K. Milford