

Georgetown United Methodist Church Consultation Report

March 30, 2014

Introduction

We, the VCI consultation team, thank William Bills, staff, lay leaders and the congregation of Georgetown United Methodist Church for the invitation to consult with this Body of Christ. The following observations and prescriptions are the result of this consultation team's study of the following information: a) Georgetown's self-study document provided by its leaders, b) a MissionInsite demographic report of the area population, c) the January 15, 2014 'Mystery Guest' report by Faith Perceptions (the result of worship visits from 12 persons from the community), d) interviews with the pastor, staff and ministry team leaders, e) a focus group with members of the congregation, f) a meeting with the Administrative Council, and g) input from the consultation workshop.

Our prayer is that God will use this assessment experience and Consultation Report to help Georgetown United Methodist Church more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and the world.

Strengths

GUM's greatest strengths follow.

1. Pastoral Leadership

Pastor Bill is clearly regarded as a strength within your church as noted in the leadership interviews as well as the Mystery Guest Report. Pastor Bill possesses many of the spiritual gifts this congregation will need as it moves into a new future, following the acceptance of these prescriptions. His ability to set clear boundaries for acceptable behavior within the life of the church and its administrative structure has great value. He applies family systems theory to addressing conflict well in the life of the congregation and provides responsive pastoral care. His preaching and teaching are deeply appreciated.

2. Theological Diversity

The GUM congregation provides the people of surrounding areas a faith community that is a theological alternative to the dominant conservatism of the area. In contrast to the offerings of neighboring churches GUM hosts opportunities for learning, conversing and trying on a variety of current social issues from a faith perspective. Questions are welcomed. Curiosity is a good thing. An open theological perspective sets your church as a beacon of hope to those who are disenfranchised. Forums such as the Interfaith Dialogue series, LGBT Inclusivity Questions & Answers, and Jesus Seminar speakers function as pertinent explorations of the Wesleyan links between scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This demonstrates a genuine openness to the full Gospel rarely noted in this westernmost part of Michigan.

3. Communication with Guests

The website is an asset. Both the consultation team and the mystery guests were positively impressed by the valuable information on the site. Mystery guests described the website as "user friendly," "answered my questions of what to wear, where to park, type of church it was, what to expect." People today depend heavily on electronic media. A clean, updated website is critical to connect them with the church. The signage, both outside and inside the building, was clear and functional. Mystery guests described it as enabling a visitor to "easily locate what was needed without having to inquire."

4. Location

GUM's location in a stable/growing area surrounded by many housing developments provides a target-rich environment for potential growth and vitality. GUM is at a major crossroads, easily accessible from all directions, and readily visible from the road. Your self-study indicates that an average of five new families worship with you each week. If you are able to capitalize on your accessibility and engage even a small percentage of your guests in the life of your congregation, you will be on the road to becoming a vital church that shares the Good News with your community.

5. Mutual Congregational Support

Several persons interviewed described the church as family, being wonderful and available during times of loss or acute need. Examples of care given included visitation, meals delivered, Stephen Ministry, and praying. One interviewee said, "The people genuinely care for each other." Your website indicates, "The Teddy Bear Ministry is an opportunity for our church family to show the love of Jesus to others during a difficult time, an occasion for celebration or just as an act of friendship." The Prayer Shawl Ministry also reaches out to offer comfort to those in need.

Concerns

GUM's greatest concerns follow.

1. Low Trust Environment

Trust is an essential element of a vital congregation. The lack of trust within the GUM congregation is evident. Leadership interviews and focus groups, as well as the VCI Self-Study Questionnaire, show a clear lack of trust. There are power struggles going on within the life of the church that include bullying through finances, a history of resisting healthy change for fear of conflict, and some key leaders failing to stand up to immature behavior. We question whether the congregation and leadership truly want peace or to forever continue the uneasy silence about the issues that separate you. Clarity of congregational values can provide a foundation upon which to build trust.

2. Failure to Leverage Sunday Morning for Mission

Sunday morning, when the membership gathers and guests seek a spiritual experience, is an opportune time to work toward the mission of the church by using the five practices of fruitful congregations. This is an expressed objective of the congregation of GUM. However, the structure and the culture of the morning are not being fully leveraged for your desired ends.

The MissionInsite study for this area shows a median age of 35. Younger people and families tend to prefer a lighter, more upbeat worship style. MissionInsite further indicates that "religious faith and practices are very important" in this community. However, GUM has positioned the service most likely to attract these people at a time not optimal to their attendance. In addition, the 11:15 AM service is inconsistent from week to week, partly because of the struggle to find musicians who will serve on a regular basis.

Radical hospitality is a learned cultural practice that must be offered to all on a consistent basis. There is a welcoming presence at the 9:00 AM service, however the 11:15 AM service is lacking in warmth and welcome. Several Mystery Guests of both services reported not being greeted at the door. Many who attended the 11:15 AM service said that no one spoke to them at any time. One mentioned a "lack of friendliness." Another said, "We tried to approach some people and they turned to people they knew." Yet another stated, "The pastor made a comment during the sermon about hospitality, and the congregation did not seem to know what that meant." Addressing these issues will dramatically increase the impact of Sunday worship.

Passionate worship is another indicator of congregational health. However, it was reported to us that worship has "a sense of going through the motions." One 9:00 AM Mystery Guest stated that "the congregation didn't seem very engaged in the singing." One interviewee expressed sadness that Sunday morning attendance, for some, seems to be a duty-- "It's just what we do on Sundays because we have always done it."

3. Intentional Faith and Leadership Development

GUM provides educational opportunities for all ages. However, there is not a clear path for intentional faith development. The Self-Study indicates that spiritual growth is weak. Numerous people interviewed clearly articulated their spiritual journey and what they believe, while also asking for ways to experience deeper spiritual growth.

Lack of an intentional faith development plan carries over into the lack of a leadership development plan. Some leaders take their roles seriously, yet leaders confirmed the Self-Study assessment that there is no "intentional plan to raise up new leaders." Additionally, there is not a method of accountability for the spiritual maturity of either existing or potential leaders. The church statistics in the Self-Study indicated a zero for the category "Leaders in Christian

Formation” for the past three years. Whether this was an oversight in reporting or not, it highlights the lack of prioritization of leadership development with intentional faith development at its core.

The lack of a plan for intentional faith and leadership development can result in an environment in which a static faith is not only accepted but assumed as normative. Your self-study indicates that you have 11 small groups, and for a church this size the VCI standard would have expected at least 15 groups. Without a clear plan for intentional faith and leadership development, GUM cannot be fruitful in carrying out its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

4. Representative Governance

GUM is blessed with staff and leaders dedicated to the church. Lack of clarity around who is responsible or privileged to make decisions on behalf of the congregation stifles the likelihood that the congregation will reach its Gospel impact potential. The congregation's effectiveness in following Jesus' example is compromised by an expectation of some in the congregation that staff and leaders are the “doers” of ministry. This is a ghost of an earlier era in which ministries were exclusively driven by staff. There is a perceived requirement of the pastor's approval for ministry details. This diverts his pastoral expertise from strategic planning and pastoral care.

The current Administrative Council is a representative decision-making body, meaning that the Council is composed of persons whose first loyalty is usually either to their respective areas of ministry or to avoid the pain of faithful, kingdom-building leadership. The consultation team heard that the Council frequently spends most of its meeting time re-hashing decisions of ministry groups. This duplicates or reverses ministry work already completed by those to whom particular ministries are delegated. This is counter to the transforming practice of empowering leaders and teams to impact the community in timely ways.

5. Lack of Risk-Taking Mission

There are examples of GUM reaching out to the community. We recognize and affirm your vision, “Actively living the example of Jesus.” A shared vision creates clarity, calms anxieties, and calls us to alignment of ministries both inside and outside the church. However, your outward-focused mission is largely passive and transactional, meaning ministry “to” rather than ministry “with.” GUM has not embraced God’s mission to make new disciples, nor does it claim its unique identity in the community. There are no clear expectations for staff, leaders, or participants in the various ministries to prioritize risk-taking mission. Clear and compelling vision, mission, and values motivate the body for effective ministry and risk-taking mission.

Prescriptions*

Upon the adoption of this report, the responsibilities of the VCI Prayer Team will expand to a covenant prayer team which will continue to pray for spiritual development to undergird the ministries and people of the church. Since this team currently exists, it is expected that they will continue to meet and invite new members to participate. To start widening the practice of prayer, the pastor will preach a Lenten sermon series on prayer in 2015. A resource is SOUL REVOLUTION by John Burke. GUM will also accept as its own the United Methodist mission, “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

To address the above concerns, GUM will implement the following prescriptions.

1. Building Trust

“If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” (Mark 3:25). It will be extremely difficult to deal well with the changes within these prescriptions if you have not clearly addressed the underlying issues that create conflict within the leadership and congregation. Change can only happen when: a) you understand the process of change b) you have established clear boundaries of behavior and communication and c) you develop an instrument to invite feedback and to hear from the congregation in the midst of change. The absence of these components explains why you have consistently struggled with change, have had significant difficulty in the midst of change, and are hesitant to move forward into a future that will require change. As this church addresses these issues, you will be able to make the changes needed to embrace the future that God intends for you. This congregation will address conflict well by building trust through the following:

- A. The congregation will have a Day of Prayer, Repentance and Forgiveness on or before June 1, 2014. This will be facilitated by the coach, or someone designated by the coach, in consultation with the pastor. This will allow the congregation to be fully prepared to let go of the pain and hurt of the past.
- B. By October 15, 2014, the coach or her designee will lead a workshop to develop and adopt a covenant of behavior and communication. The clarity this covenant brings will allow the congregation to better support and hold each other accountable around healthy and timely communication and behavior. In preparation for the workshop, we suggest using The Rule of Christ, which is an application of Matthew 18, available from your coach. Another resource is the skills learned in the Fall, 2013 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION SKILLS FOR CHURCHES, and skills practicum sessions, 'Neutralizing History,' led by your coach.
- C. The coach, a certified facilitator, shall facilitate the Franklin Covey workshop, The Speed of Trust™ for key leaders. The church shall incur the costs for this workshop as an investment in the future of this church.
- D. Transparency is a critical element to healthy decision-making processes. The leaders, in consultation with the coach, will create a quarterly feedback plan for the congregation to help the leaders understand and own the impact of their key decisions. These could include structured open forums, focus groups, etc. This plan will be fully implemented by January 1, 2015. Resources may include: CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ANXIOUS TIMES by Peter Steinke, FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM by Patrick Lencioni, and WHO STOLE MY CHURCH by Gordon MacDonald.

2. Leveraging Sunday Morning for Mission

- A. In order to reposition your "contemporary" service so that it is more focused on the age 35 demographic, the pastor and worship leader, in consultation with the coach, will form a Worship Transition Team by May 31, 2014 which will do the following:
1. Transition the congregation to a single blended service from July through September.
 2. Develop a launch strategy, in consultation with the coach, that will focus the second service onto the desired demographic by June 15, 2014.
 3. Refine the fall worship schedule such that the contemporary service is optimally scheduled for the needs of young families. It is recommended that it start no earlier than mid-morning and conclude no later than noon.
- B. To build a culture of radical hospitality, the GUM Hospitality Team will implement the following:
1. Develop a plan for an integrated, consistent guest experience before, during, and after worship. Suggested resources include the books THE RACE TO REACH OUT by Douglas Anderson, FUSION by Nelson Searcy, or FIVE PRACTICES: RADICAL HOSPITALITY workbook by Robert Schnase. The plan shall be completed by July 1, 2014.
 2. This plan shall be implemented no later than October 1, 2014.
- C. Passionate Worship is part of the disciple-making process for members and guests alike.
1. The coach or designee will conduct a worship workshop focusing on worship experiences that connect people with God and with each other. This workshop will be attended by the Worship Planning Team and all persons connected with worship planning and execution, including the below-mentioned task forces, no later than June 1, 2014.
 2. A Worship Evaluation Task Force of 4-6 people with gifts for worship will be created by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, no later than May 15, 2014. This task force shall implement the following:
 - a. Review the findings of the Faith Perceptions Mystery Guest Report of January 15, 2014 and note areas of concern regarding both worship services no later than May 30, 2014.
 - b. Visit at least three other churches of 200-300 attendance who are doing effective passionate worship for participants under the age 40 by July 30, 2014. A resource person is Gary Step at the West Michigan Conference.

- c. Develop a plan to enhance the worship experience by first objectively observing and determining how a guest might experience worship here. This plan will be developed by September 15, 2014.
- d. Full implementation of the plan will take place by the first Sunday in Advent, 2014.

3. Intentional Faith and Leadership Development

A. Intentional Faith Development Task Force

1. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, will put together a Faith Development Task Force of 3-5 people on or before June 1, 2014.
2. The Task Force will create a clear road map for faith development that will move people to becoming maturing followers of Jesus Christ. The discipleship path will be designed for everyone from non-believers to those maturing in their faith. This discipleship path will represent a lifelong process within a Wesleyan relational model that encourages all persons:
 - to connect, grow, and serve in their relationship with Jesus Christ;
 - to help them be transformed by studying the principles of the Christian faith;
 - to provide connection opportunities with other believers for support and accountability;
 - to be in service to others for the purpose of the mission.

Suggested resources are *THE RACE TO REACH OUT* by Doug Anderson, *DEEPENING YOUR EFFECTIVENESS* by Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy, or *A DISCIPLE'S PATH* by James Harnish.

3. This new process will be adopted and implemented in the life of GUM at all ministry levels (children, youth and adults) no later than September 1, 2015.
4. The 2015 Leadership Roster will include an Intentional Faith Development Team of 6-8 people for an ongoing process of evaluation, improvement, and implementation.

B. Developing new leaders is imperative to effective ministry growth. The pastor and the Administrative Council Chair, in consultation with the coach, shall name a Leadership Development Task Force of 3-5 people by June 1, 2014.

1. This task force, in consultation with the coach, will study and develop a plan for identifying, recruiting, training, supporting, and deploying new leaders according to their giftedness by January 1, 2015. This plan will include the dismissal of leaders who are ineffective in their ministry role.
2. This plan will be fully implemented by Church Conference, Fall, 2015. Suggested resources are a spiritual gifts inventory, and *ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE* by Sue Nilson Kibbey.

4. Policy Governance

GUM will deliberately embrace policy governance as its new "permission-giving" organizational plan. We commend the staff for work already begun in moving ministry groups away from committees (mostly reporting and socializing) toward ministry teams implementing goals of their respective ministry areas. Policy governance aligns authority, responsibility, and accountability with vision, mission, and values.

GUM will initiate this move from a representative Administrative Council to policy governance by following these steps:

A. The pastor and the Church Council Chair, in consultation with the coach, shall name a Governance Task Force of 3-5 people to study effective policy governance board structures that support relevant and timely ministries by June 1, 2014.

B. The coach or designee shall facilitate the two-part workshop, Accountability Leadership and Policy Governance Boards, for all current and incoming leaders and interested congregants no later than October 15, 2014.

C. The Task Force will present a restructure plan to Church Conference, Fall, 2014. A suggested resource is *WINNING ON PURPOSE* by John Kaiser. A resource person is Rod Kalajainen, pastor, Redeemer UMC, DeWitt.

D. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, shall facilitate an initial and on-going training for ministry team leaders and board members on effective ministry teams by November 1, 2014.

E. This Policy Governance Board shall be fully operational with the 2015 slate of officers.

5. Risk-Taking Mission

A. The Missions Team shall evaluate current outreach ministries and design a relationship-building strategy with participants in current outreach ministries. Examples would be for food pantry recipients to have a way to share their prayer requests, Scouts and Sunday School students to connect at a fun event, or for the congregation to serve the East Ottawa Special Needs ministry.

1. This evaluation shall be concluded no later than July 1, 2014.
2. The strategy implementation shall begin no later than September 1, 2014.

B. A Bridge-Building Events Team shall be formed by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, by June 1, 2014. This team shall plan two events intended to share the love of God with the community. The focus will be on connecting the congregation relationally with the people of the community who participate in each event.

1. The first event will take place no later than November, 2014.
2. The second event will take place no later than Summer, 2015.

THE RACE TO REACH OUT by Doug Anderson is a possible resource.

D. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, shall form a team of 2-3 people to choose and implement an all-church study. This All-Church Study Team shall be formed no later than June 1, 2014. This team shall select a study intended to equip the congregation to share the Good News with others. Suggested resources are GET THEIR NAME by Bob Farr, Doug Anderson, and Kay Kotan or JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM by Bill Hybels.

1. The study will begin no later than September, 2014.
2. In conjunction with the study, the pastor will preach a sermon series of no less than three messages beginning in September, 2014. These messages shall focus on sharing faith stories with each other and equipping the congregation to reach out by inviting those with whom they already have relationships to attend a worship service or church event.

Conclusion

We, the consulting team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation through this Vital Church Initiative assessment process. Our prayers and hope for your congregation are that God will use this process to help your church become more effective and fruitful.

Ben Ingebretson, Lead Consultant
Pamela Stewart

Naomi Garcia, Coach
Bruce Kintigh

Mara Marsman, Scribe
Tim Wright

Town Hall Meeting Dates

Tuesday, April 1	7:00 PM
Monday, April 7	7:00 PM
Sunday, April 13	12:15 PM
Wednesday, April 16	7:00 PM

Church Conference Date

Sunday, May 4	12:15 PM
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**Note: Prescription deadlines may be adjusted in consultation with the assigned VCI coach.*