



## **Edenton Street United Methodist Church Visioning Update (Feb. 2024) Current State Assessment: Executive Summary**

Friends,

As you know, ESUMC is in the midst of a visioning and strategic planning process in which we seek to discern what God is calling us to be and to do in the next season of our life as a congregation. Thank you to the hundreds of ESUMC members who have participated in this effort so far!

We want to ensure that the ESUMC family understands where we are in the process and what is to come. To help do that, we have prepared this document, which summarizes (1) why we are undertaking the visioning and planning process, (2) what we have learned so far, and (3) where we are headed in the coming weeks and months.

### **Why is ESUMC undertaking this process?**

Visioning and strategic planning are typical practices for churches and other nonprofit organizations, though for churches a unique aspect of visioning involves intentional efforts to understand God's particular calling for a congregation. Visioning is about what God calls us to be and to do; strategic planning is about how we will pursue that vision.

Over the past quarter century, ESUMC has engaged in a visioning process every five to eight years. Many of those efforts (e.g., 1997, 2002, 2010) addressed the full scope of ESUMC's activities, while the 2018 effort focused on the future of the church's multi-site model.

In 2023, the Church Council decided to launch a new visioning process, in part because of the time that has passed since the last such effort, but also because so much has changed in recent years. These factors include the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition of Church on Morgan (COM) and (later this year) Southeast Raleigh Table (SER\T) to independent status, new pastoral leadership, and changes within the United Methodist Church. For all of these reasons, it is appropriate as a congregation to step back, catch our breath, and prayerfully listen for God's call.

### **What have we learned so far? (Current State Assessment)**

As a first step, the [Vision Leadership Team](#) (VLT) completed a data-rich "**current state assessment**" of ESUMC that was designed to give VLT members a **shared understanding of where the church and our community stand today**. Key takeaways are summarized as follows.

*Environmental Scan: The American Church, The NC Conference, and Raleigh / Wake County*

- Data from the [Pew Research Center](#) sheds light on why Americans do, and do not, go to church. The primary reason Americans cited for going to church is to become closer to God, while other major reasons included giving their children a moral foundation, to become a better person, and for comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. Among Americans who do not go to church, 37% said they practice their faith in different ways, 28% said they were not believers, and 22% said they don't attend for logistical reasons.

- Data from [The Great Dechurching](#) explore in detail the “dechurched,” defined as adults who used to attend church at least once per month but now go less than once per year. Approximately 15% of U.S. adults (40 million people) are considered dechurched, and the issue spans mainline Protestant, Catholic, and other churches. Of the 40 million dechurched, 10 million left because of pain they experienced within the church, and 30 million left the church more casually because of a life change or competing priorities.
- Data from 10 North Carolina United Methodist churches similar to ESUMC show that membership and giving were flat over a 10-year period, with average Sunday attendance dropping significantly in 2020.
- According to the [Downtown Raleigh Alliance](#), the population of our downtown has grown by 96% since 2000 and is growing at a faster rate than the city overall. The downtown population is projected to double over the next five years.
- Major challenges affecting Raleigh and Wake County include, but are not limited to, affordable housing and homelessness, access to healthcare, education and literacy, food insecurity, mental health, and poverty.

#### *ESUMC Membership and Financial Giving*

- Most of the trends reflected in ESUMC’s data are comparable to what is happening at many other American and Methodist churches, though a few are unique to our circumstances.
- ESUMC has experienced a significant amount of “churn” in membership and giving since 2017. Some of the declines in giving are associated with members shifting to COM and SERIT, but much of the trend is not connected with those shifts as might be presumed.
- A meaningful number of members left ESUMC or stopped giving during the COVID-19 pandemic. ESUMC had about 20% fewer givers in 2022 than in 2020, which according to [Pew](#) is the same percentage of Americans who attend religious services *in person* less often following the pandemic. That said, a significant number of households joined ESUMC in 2021 as well.
- Also in 2021, ESUMC received more dollars from new members than any year in church history (and on an inflation-adjusted basis, more than any year other than 2001).
- The churn seems to be settling, and there are some encouraging signs. Average gift size has increased, while 2023 marked the first time since 2016 that the number of givers increased.

#### *ESUMC Ministries and Missions*

- ESUMC is fortunate to have a wide range of vibrant ministries in which staff and laity are doing extraordinary work. These include contemporary and traditional worship services; a music and worship arts program engaging children, youth, and adults; children’s and youth ministries; an early childhood program; discipleship ministries ranging from Sunday school to small groups and Bible studies; and care ministries including new hubs focused on specific topics.
- ESUMC’s Missions ministry has a rich history, in which our church has catalyzed the development of several important community organizations.
- The annual financial impact of ESUMC Missions exceeds \$300,000 annually. This figure includes an annual budget of \$110,000 (in 2023), ~\$135,000 of support for Doorstep Ministry, and \$75,000 in additional giving. Roughly 70% of ESUMC giving is targeted locally, while 30% of it is distributed internationally.

- ESUMC supports community partners that tend to fall into one of three categories: “Home” (e.g., affordable housing), “Nourish” (e.g., food insecurity), and “Flourish” (e.g., schools and children). The church also collaborates with a handful of advocacy organizations.
- ESUMC also provides use of its facilities for a variety of groups. Missional partners and efforts utilizing ESUMC space include, but are not limited to, Doorstep Ministry, Learning Together, the Ruth Sheets Center, the White Flag Shelter for Women, and, most recently, The Well.

### **Where are we headed in the coming weeks and months?**

A robust **listening phase** is now underway. Elements include congregational listening sessions, interviews with staff and a representative sample of members, and conversations with ESUMC community partners. A congregational survey will be conducted in February. In the spring, the VLT will use the information gathered to date to inform its visioning work. After those outcomes are shared in late spring / early summer, we will turn to more detailed strategic planning.

If you would like to explore the Current State Assessment in more detail, please listen to two visioning [podcasts](#)—to be released on February 6 and 13—featuring Rev. Greg Moore and VLT Co-Chairs Kathryn Holding and Eric Johnson. You can also review documents utilized by the VLT by clicking [here](#) and requesting access.

As always, if you have any questions, please connect with us at church or reach out to us at [visionteam@esumc.org](mailto:visionteam@esumc.org).

In Christ,

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