



**Report for
St. Mark's United Methodist Church**



October 20, 2019

The Weekend Innovation Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the St. Mark's UMC staff and NLI leadership team. It has been an honor to share in this time of prayer and discernment together as we explored how God has blessed your congregation and the next level innovations of your ministry.

Strengths

1. Pastor

St. Mark's is blessed to have a pastor who brings incredible gifts and graces to her work. As we listened to those who have served through the ministries of this church over many years and to those who have become members more recently, a common thread is recognition that Pastor Fran is a gifted preacher whose Biblically-based sermons align in amazing ways with the challenges of members' lives. Fran is one who listens well because she cares deeply for those in her flock, one who has discerned well the challenges that confront St. Mark's, and has taken often difficult steps to help the church prepare so that it may thrive into the future.

2. Ministry Structure

St. Mark's has adopted (and adapted) a structure for ministry that could serve as a model for many congregations. We were struck with the rationale that guided the development of the Vision Council and Guiding Council along with ministry teams whose leadership has a well-defined path and process for mentoring the next generation of leadership. All involved with the new council structure observed that meetings now have more focused purpose, that the structure engages laity, and promotes greater interaction and cooperation among ministry groups.

3. Awesome People

In interviews with staff, lay leaders, newer and long-time members, we repeatedly heard that St. Mark's is distinguished by its people...people who are described as welcoming, loving, open, always ready to help others. This was particularly evident in the way the congregation navigated the discussions and decisions at General Conference as St. Mark's manifested love for all in the name of Jesus.



4. Hard-working Staff

One person spoke for many as he marveled at the dedication of the staff, especially considering their level of pay. Others noted that the staff are good stewards of the resources at their disposal, that they are incredibly devoted, that each goes “above and beyond the call of duty.” Their passion is evident as is their desire to support the community at St. Mark’s.

5. Amazing youth and children

St. Mark’s is fortunate to have an amazing group of youth and children who engage in activities that are central to growth in the faith. We witnessed that dedication on Saturday as the youth presented and participated in the all-day workshop. All those we met mentioned that this is one of the hallmarks of the church and continued support is vital.

Challenges

1. Engagement

Several individuals observed that far too many at St. Mark’s are “one hour” people, here only for worship on Sunday. In a similar vein, others observed that St. Mark’s offers amazing “one and done” programs that engage larger numbers as they reach out to the community beyond (e.g., Trunk or Treat, St. Mark’s Has Left the Building, etc.). Others mentioned that St. Mark’s relies all too often on a “core” group of individuals who assume leadership positions and who are always there for worship and ministry activities. They further worried out loud that these individuals are subject to “burn-out” and suggested that it is time to engage a greater percentage of the St. Mark’s family in the work of ministry.

2. A distinct path for discipleship

Many observed that it is vital for the children’s and youth ministries to continue to grow, noting that these offer well-defined ways for the younger cohort to grow in their faith. Similarly, most individuals we interviewed pointed to small groups as a key to growth in their faith as well. Still, nearly everyone observed that there is no staff member in charge of adult discipleship (this responsibility falls to the senior pastor who already has more than enough on her plate). There is a desire for a well-defined path for growing in the faith, a path that is buttressed by more opportunities to engage in small groups.



3. Resources

St. Mark's United Methodist Church has resource challenges. Nearly two of every five budget dollars are consumed by debt payments. Add in staff and that rises to four of every five dollars even as financial resources have been dwindling in recent years. Every church leader spent time reflecting on the difficulties of funding ministries and strengthening outreach to the surrounding community as donations and other sources of revenue decline. Further, even as the church has developed a ministry structure that serves much better than its predecessor, there remains work to be done to align resources with ministry. As mentioned earlier, there is no paid staff member assigned to coordinate adult discipleship and other ministries are supported by only part-time staff. Further, engaging greater numbers of volunteers in all ministries is necessary.

4. Worship and Connectedness

St. Mark's has three worship services each Sunday morning (two essentially traditional and one contemporary). The 9:45 service is held in the gymnasium and requires a good bit of time and energy to set up and disassemble each week. All those who shared about worship spoke to the ways in which the services invite them to connect with God and lift up their voices in praise, even as they pondered how multiple services create a sense of disconnectedness to the congregation as a whole. Many wondered out loud whether it might be time to consider other expressions of worship, some that may be lay led. This would offer a worship opportunity for those whose work or other obligations require their presence on Sunday mornings. Others mentioned that worship services would be enhanced by greater collaboration among the music leaders and those leading other parts of the service, to create an environment of excellence in worship.

5. Moving ahead

One challenge common to all United Methodist congregations is that pastors move...and that pastors bring differing gifts and graces to their roles. No one person in the role of senior pastor is going to make every single member of a church family happy. Therefore, when a pastoral change happens, some enter a grieving process, feeling the loss of a minister with whom they felt particularly close. Even as Pastor Fran is in her fifth year of service, and most express great confidence in her abilities, and the way she has poised the congregation for successful ministry into the future, some express an unwillingness to move ahead and to adapt to change. If St. Mark's is to thrive, it is now long past time to dwell on what is no more, and time (as one person put it) for everyone to decide whether they will be part of the problem or part of the solution.



Next Level Innovations

“To become a competent and compelling congregation in the twenty-first century is a very complex, messy, hard, culture-changing, and long process. It requires a great deal of prayer, endurance, hard work, dedication, risk, and tenacity.”

Bob Farr and Kay Kotan, *10 Prescriptions for a Healthy Church*, xv, 2015

As we look to the future for St. Mark’s, the Weekend Innovation Team celebrates what this church has done in creating a new structure for ministry, one that focuses on goals and promotes greater interaction, more connectedness within the congregation as a whole, valuing the benefits that result from coordination. Your structure is a resource multiplier that informs the innovations we recommend, each of which is focused on aligning resources for success as you endeavor to fulfill your mission to grow, live, and love as followers of Jesus Christ.

1. GROW: Establish an intentional discipleship path

Resources have been aligned well to undergird programs for children and youth and adult discipleship needs a similar support structure. Ideally, this would be a full-time staff member. Considering resource restrictions, however, we recommend that the pastor establish a task force:

- to identify a Discipleship Path that defines “discipleship,” then develops discipleship groups for adults, and engages these to build on existing discipleship programs for children and youth.

The task force should be established by January 2020 and develop its definition of “discipleship” no later than the end of February 2020, and forward recommendations for adult discipleship groups to the Vision Council by March of 2020. The Adult Discipleship team, based on the recommendations of the task force, then should plan for a deliberate re-launch of the discipleship process by Fall of 2020.



2. LIVE: Worship and connectedness

Jesus declared that the greatest commandment of all is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

Worship is at the heart of who we are as the body of Christ, the primary vehicle by which we love God as the church in the world. Even so, worship at St. Mark’s occurs at multiple services and this leads many to feel disconnected from the congregation as a whole. Therefore, St. Mark’s would do well to wrestle with this question: How can we go about worship that serves well to love God even as it enables the congregation to draw closer together as followers of Jesus Christ?

We therefore recommend that the pastor establish a task force:

1. to evaluate current services and the level of staffing required for excellent worship;
2. to consider the number and style of worship services, then
3. to develop proposals for revamping worship, including the possibility of a fresh expression;
4. Serious consideration should be given to reducing the number of Sunday morning services from three to two.

The task force should begin work by January of 2020 and submit its recommendations to the Vision Council by March of 2020. Implementation of these proposals should take place no later than the Fall of 2020.



3. LOVE: Care and service

Jesus declared that the second greatest commandment of all is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Fulfilling the second greatest commandment offers the opportunity to bring the people of St. Mark’s together in common endeavor.

We therefore recommend that you redefine the Service to Others Team as a Community Care Team:

1. to evaluate the number and effectiveness of existing missional programs,
2. to identify an ongoing mission outreach effort that will focus the gifts and graces of the membership in united effort, and
3. to develop an intentional approach to enable St. Mark’s to reach those who do not yet know Jesus as their Lord and Savior through an invitation to become part of our worship and ministries.

These recommendations should be forwarded to the Vision Council by March of 2020.

4. Resource stewardship

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

St. Mark’s will not succeed in its mission to grow, live, and love as followers of Jesus Christ if the church has insufficient resources. Therefore, we recommend that St. Mark’s cultivate a culture of cheerful giving:

A. Financial Stewardship

1. Celebrate the ways that the generosity of St. Mark’s makes disciples of Jesus Christ and transforms the world. Be intentional about spreading the good word of how your financial stewardship makes a difference in Richmond and beyond.



2. Develop a covenant wherein the members of the staff, the Guiding Council and Vision Council commit to ongoing spiritual development including sacrificial giving, thereby leading by example.
 3. Provide ongoing seminars in budgeting, saving, giving, estate planning, and provisions that need to be made in case of a health crisis or death.
- B. Undertake a capital campaign to raise funds for debt retirement, building and property maintenance, and for funding for new ministry initiatives. We recommend that the church employ an outside consultant for this purpose (spring 2020) and that the campaign be launched by the fall of 2020.
- C. Human resources:
1. Become more intentional in engaging members. St. Mark's has good procedures in place to identify the gifts and graces God has sent your way. The church now needs to find ways to assure that greater numbers of people are connected so that their gifts and graces "serve abundantly in every good work." St. Mark's needs to focus on engaging new members, not on re-engaging those who have concluded that another venue may serve them better or have decided to be inactive.
 2. Develop a plan that further aligns staff to support the vital ministries of St. Mark's, evaluating how best to staff ministry, recognizing that some areas require full-time support while others may thrive with only part-time staff.



Timeline

- January 3, 2020.....Pastor establishes discipleship task force and worship task force, engages Community Care Team to begin its work
- February 28, 2020 ..Discipleship Task Force completes work to define “discipleship”
- March, 2020.....Discipleship Task Force, Worship Task Force, and Community Care Team submit recommendations to Vision Council
- Engage consultant to guide planning for capital campaign
- Fall, 2020.....Formal re-launch of discipleship program
- Implementation of recommendations for revamped worship
- Implementation of recommendations for Community Care Team
- Launch of capital campaign

Next Steps

St. Mark’s will hold Town Hall meetings within the next 30 days to discuss this report and recommended innovations. The dates for these town halls are as follows:

- Sunday, November 10 at 12:15 p.m. Lunch and Discussion
- Monday, November 11, at 6:30 p.m.

The congregation will vote on this report at an official church conference led by the district superintendent on Sunday, November 24 at 12:15 p.m. Everyone is invited to a lunch following worship that morning, then the called church conference will be held.

If the report and innovations are approved by a vote of 70% or more of the members present and voting, the NLI process will continue. Your mentor will assist your leadership in implementing these innovations.



If the report and innovations are rejected, the NLI process will be deemed complete. Your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded, and the resources of NLI will move on to other churches.

The church office will be closed on Monday, October 21 to offer space and a time of rest for the staff. We appreciate the hard work that has gone into making this weekend so successful.

Please feel free to share observations and comments in preparation for the upcoming Town Halls by emailing to stmarksnli@gmail.com

Report Written by:

Rev. Dr. Paul Baker
Rev. Lindsey Baynham
Rev. Dr. Michelle Chaney
Rev. Marg Kutz
Ms. Maria Maxwell
Rev. Dr. Pete Moon

