

## Summary of Visioning Committee Work 2007

The Visioning Committee has been looking at the necessity to attract new members, encourage current members and understand the dynamics of growing a congregation.

We spent considerable time in the first few months on looking at who this church is from a historical perspective. We discussed who were founders; why it was founded; how it has changed; how the church is perceived in the community; and whether current efforts within the church are expended to keep the church the “way it has always been” or to look at “new occasions<sup>+</sup>, teach new duties.”

Hospitality is a major factor when people come into a church for the first time. Therefore, the committee looked how hospitable is United – from the time a person walks in, to how clear is the bulletin to a new person, to what follow up should be done. Some suggestions that emerged included wearing name tags, making sure someone was at the door early to greet people, the way announcements are made (by assuming there are people there who do not know everyone), to making the bulletin clear so that a first time person would know what to do.

We also began to try to get the church visible: by sending a post card to someone inviting them to church, sending a post card to an inactive member, sending a post card to thank an active member for work, putting a “God Is Still Speaking” hanger on the rear view mirror of our cars when parked and talking to at least one person on the street about the church.

In order to understand the decision-making process of the church, we spent several sessions analyzing how decisions are made, who has the power in the church to enable or block things and how the power structure influences the rest of the congregation.

We had an interesting conversation on the question: If a church is failing, is it failing because the members and leaders want it to fail? On the surface, that answer is an easy “no.” However, looked at more intensely there is an awareness that in order to succeed some people have to share power, some old ideas are no longer operative, some fund raising strategies no longer work, etc. Trying to hold on to those is to assure failing and, the reason they

are held on to is to accommodate the present congregation without thought of new-comers or the younger generation.

We looked at the church budget from the standpoint of “What portions of the budget are clearly there for growth and outreach?” Unfortunately, not much.

We had several discussions on how diminishing resources impact the thinking of the church. To summarize: the people who control the resources take the key positions and policies and programs are defined in terms of lack of resources. The standard operating stance is “we can NOT do this because we do NOT have the resources. This leads the church to say NO to efforts to add new programs, which in turn means NO new members. The people who control the resources will do so until the church dies.

Committee members went to lunch with the pastor to share their experiences from the pew. They also wrote prayers to be used in various ways.

At a congregation pot luck dinner the committee collected a lot of data about the congregation’s hopes regarding Worship, Fellowship, and Outreach.

From my perspective there were a few things that jumped out in terms of almost immediate need: Music was the big one. One person summed it up well with the statement “Make the music more awakening, some of the music, although beautiful, makes you want to sleep.” I believe a key discovery of the Visioning Committee will be that the current Hymnal is too outdated to attract new members and to have more meaningful worship hymns.

There were also numerous requests for more get-togethers. While, I interpreted much of that to mean resorting to past get-together type experiences, I also believe such gatherings are an ideal way to reach out into the community and invite them in to share.

Public relations was also raised – especially a need to reach new residents and periodically to get a piece of information to every house in the general community.

The committee took on the responsibility of hosting the Peace Bubble.

They have also begun plans for pot luck suppers inviting the neighbors and for another potluck dinner to keep the congregation informed.

The pot luck meals are part of an over-all effort to listen to both the community and the church and to bring the two together around some specific events.

Some key items that the committee is keeping in mind as we plan specific events are: Thinking of a time line that includes some specific congregation-wide activity each month; working to be sure no one feels pushed aside as we seek to include new people; keeping in mind the words “covenant renewal” as vital to the future way we think.

Currently we are preparing a letter of welcome to new residents moving into the community. We are approaching area businesses, the elementary school and the senior center so that we can use the letter to introduce new residents to the wider community. One business is offering a 15% discount on custom picture framing if a new resident brings in the letter. The senior center has listed some volunteer opportunities. We still need to meet with the school principal and with some of the other businesses to be included in the letter. The letter invites people to United Evangelical and encourages them to be involved in the total community.

We have begun listening to community members about how to use the Christian Education building. This is exciting to the business community also. The florist recently told me that bringing groups into the building and creating a community non-profit center was one of the most exciting things she has heard.

I believe that most of the “theory” type work has been done by the committee. Now, our task is to involve the whole congregation so that they become as connected to each other as the committee members have become. We are looking at having small group meals where the church is divided up into a manageable size of 8-10 people in each group. The meals will be hosted by a member and one of the Vision Committee members will facilitate a discussion about the life of our congregation. Hopefully, these groups will “gel” and meet for several times. Both Cathy and I will meet with groups at the beginning to help get started.

We need, I believe, to lift up to the congregation every success we have!  
When a church is operating from fear of dying they often miss the signs of  
hope which can be transforming.

These are my reflections on the work done to date by the Visioning  
Committee.

Jim Bell