

Northlawn United Methodist Church

CONSULTATION REPORT – January 22, 2017



Introduction

We, the VCI Consultation Team, thank Rev. Tim Wright, staff, lay leadership and the congregation of Northlawn 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) Northlawn's self-study documents provided by its leaders, which includes, *MissionInsite* demographic reports of the area population, the January 10, 2017 'Mystery Guest' report by Faith Perceptions - the result of worship visits by 12 persons from the community – *Readiness 360 Report* and worship videos, b) interviews with pastors, staff and ministry leaders, c) a focus group with members of the congregation, d) a meeting with the Administrative Team, and e) input from the consultation workshop.

We are confident that God will use this assessment experience and consultation report, to help Northlawn United Methodist Church to more effectively be and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and the world.

Strengths

1. Genuine Friendliness

The Consultation Team found friendliness to be one of the top-ranking strengths in three ways: the Mystery Guests, the Leadership Team of the Life in the Spirit Seminar and participants in the VCI Larger Church Path class. The teams found Northlawn UMC to be gracious hosts each time they visited. One Mystery Guest arrived in the rain. A greeter with an umbrella came to the car! A memorable experience for any visitor. Interviewees noted this genuine care and concern is a part of the culture of the church.

2. Spacious Building

Northlawn UMC is a well-kept attractive building with eye catching landscaping that captures the attention of people as they pass by. The property has ample parking. A Mystery Guest noted that "The grass and landscaping was very attractive and healthy." The building provides both historical and modern design with rooms that are spacious and flexible, providing many opportunities for a variety of ministries. Northlawn UMC has many reasons to feel proud of its facility.

3. Location is in a Diverse Community

Northlawn UMC is blessed with the location in a diverse residential community. The opportunity for multi-cultural ministry is abundant! The *MissionInsite* study area defined by the boundaries of 4 Mile Road, I-96, Leonard Street and the Grand River indicates 22% of the population to be ethnically diverse. The biggest demographic group in the community is 'Singles and Starters – Digital Dependents,' otherwise known as millennials. This group is described as being a mix of Generation Y and X singles that live digital-driven, urban lifestyles. Reaching this demographic group will be a big step in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. You are already ahead of the game by capitalizing on the high-traffic volume of Fuller Ave. The changing signage lets the community know things are happening at Northlawn UMC!

4. Leadership Ready for Adaptive Change

The leaders of Northlawn UMC, both pastors and lay leaders, show some readiness for adaptive change. Thirty-five persons attended the Healthy Congregations workshop with a desire to move beyond the past into the future. The VCI Team of 14 spent 9 months learning more about change. More than 20 people attended the Pre Consultation Workshop. In addition, many in the congregation participated in the September 2016 Life in the Spirit Seminar. Simply put, Northlawn UMC is leaning into its potential future in the community becoming more outwardly focused and sharing God's love with others.

5. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is present to you and in you! In the interviews, we repeatedly heard people talk of the Spirit at work in their lives and in this congregation. The 2016 Life in the Spirit Seminar and its commissioning of your 10-

member Altar Prayer Team demonstrate it. The new practice of silent retreats and increased engagement and energy in worship prove it. When sharing joys in a worship video, a worshiper described sharing the love of Christ. Churches that recognize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are better able to collaborate with the Creator and the Redeemer to do their God-given mission and ministry.

Concerns

1. Lack of Vision, Mission and Ministry Alignment

The Consultation Team affirms your “How We Live Together Covenant” which sets a standard of how you will be with each other. We confirm your mission statement based on Matthew 28, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The Consultation Team found no evidence of a shared vision, giving focus to ministry and setting a stage for alignment. Without a clear shared vision, Northlawn UMC programs and relationships function for their own sake with no end or goal in mind. A vision statement gives passionate focus to living your values and mission. The Consultation Team is confident you are ready to develop a vision, find focus and align ministries.

2. Insufficient Leadership and Faith Development

There are committed leaders and followers of Jesus Christ at Northlawn UMC. You provide some opportunities for adults. Children and youth ministries are weak, at best. There is no faith development plan for those new to the faith or those maturing in Christ. Being a disciple precedes being a leader. There is no evidence of sufficient practices of leadership development. An interviewee stated, “there is no unified effort to make it happen.” Comments from the *Readiness 360 Report* included, “there is a lack of leadership and volunteers” and “I believe we have to build up leaders in our congregation before we can send them out to start new ministry.” Healthy Christian vitality requires a process of lifelong faith development, our work is never done! When churches are healthy a robust system of leadership identification, selection, and development occurs.

3. Limited Understanding of Stewardship

Northlawn UMC vowed to faithfully participate in ministries by its prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Focus groups, interviews, the *Readiness 360 Report*, and the 2017 Leadership Worksheet indicate that not enough people serve. Service is a critical component of stewardship. The Consultation Team noticed a striking difference between the use of the original building and the newer part of the building. The original building appears as if you haven’t quite moved out; or moved into the newer building using it to its full potential. Clutter has collected throughout the facility. While attendance declined, Northlawn paid full ministry shares from 2013-2015, met expenses, demonstrated a desire to pay down the mortgage quicker, and attempted to secure an audit. Interviews, documents, and a focus group convinced the Consultation Team that you do not have an accurate understanding of your financial reality. In 2016 a number of issues resulted in the inability to pay full ministry shares, reduce the mortgage, allocate funds appropriately, and meet expenses. Currently, four of the top 10 givers are reducing pledges due to changing financial circumstances. Twenty giving units provide 70% of the current budget. Anticipated expenditures for 2017 are estimated to be \$18,000 to \$30,000 less than expected revenue. Financial stewardship lacks appropriate leadership and division of responsibilities. Interviewees explained disorganized accounting and inadequate software training. Without a broad understanding of stewardship, all other concerns in this report are negatively affected.

4. Transactional vs Relational Community Interactions

The Consultation Team commends Northlawn UMC for the ways you reach out: the Christmas Eve Dinner for emergency personnel, the Women of Northlawn focus on mission, Annual Missions Craft Show, Movie Night, Supper House and North End Community Ministries. As good and necessary as these outreach ministries are they are transactional (ministry to), rather than relational (ministry with). Knowing and being known by your neighbors is foundational to knowing what gifts each brings to meet one another’s needs. There is no intentional approach for bringing persons from the community into personal relationships with the Christ. Fruitful outreach in any form, whether financial or hands-on, is also relational; not just transactional.

5. Worship Quality and Flow

Your blended worship meets the needs of some who are already in worship. Traditional elements include the bell choir, selection of music and overall atmosphere. One Mystery Guest reported, “music style was blended, but leaned more toward the traditional side.” Other Mystery Guests described the music as: “lacking enthusiasm” and “The music would probably appeal most to those of retirement age.” The few contemporary elements are the tv monitors and flexibility of ‘songs of praise and worship’ in the bulletin. The two styles are not balanced in your worship design. The Consultation Team found the current worship to lack consistency, continuity and flow. Several interviewees described short-term planning as the norm. An interviewee stated, “I wish they would choose one style or the other,” referring to contemporary or traditional styles. Blended worship rarely works: it is too contemporary for the traditionalists, and too traditional for the contemporaries. Blended worship is profoundly limiting your capacity to grow.

Prescriptions*

By **March 1, 2017**, the pastor, in consultation with the coach, will lead a worship of spiritual renewal to embrace God’s lead.

The Prayer Team will pray for the full implementation of these prescriptions.

1. Vision, Mission, Ministry Alignment

To discern your God-given vision you will accomplish the following strategy:

A. ~~Vision~~

- ~~1) A Vision Writing Team of 3-4 persons named by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, by **March 1, 2017**, will write a vision statement based on the concepts of the Visioning workshop described below.~~
- ~~2) The directive coach, or designee, will facilitate a Visioning Workshop for the congregation no later than **April 1, 2017**. The purpose of this workshop is to begin clarifying who God calls Northlawn to be.~~
- ~~3) The vision shall be rolled out to the congregation no later than **May 15, 2017 (May 21, 2017)**.~~

B. Ministry Audit

- 1) The pastor, in consultation with the coach, shall recruit 3-5 people to oversee a ministry audit by **Aug 1, 2017**. Every ministry area will demonstrate how it will accomplish its part of the congregation’s covenant, mission and vision. Ministries will be evaluated by their faithfulness to the covenant, mission and vision and their fruitfulness (or results).
- 2) Any ministries not in alignment will be brought into alignment within six months. If, after six months, a ministry does not align with the church’s covenant, mission and vision, it will be celebrated and dissolved. Suggested resources are: ‘Ministry Audit Workbook’ (MiConference VCI) and *Six Questions Every Leader Should Ask* by Andy Stanley.

C. Goal Setting

- 1) An all-congregation Goal Setting Workshop facilitated by the coach or designee shall occur no later than **July 30, 2017**.
- 2) Ministry areas will set goals for 2017-2018 by **October 1, 2017** and submit them for information to the Administrative Team.
- 3) Thereafter the Admin. Team or equivalent body shall host and facilitate an annual long range planning retreat. This planning retreat will be the foundation for ministry area goal-setting. The first of these long range planning retreats shall occur no later than **December 31, 2017**.
- 4) All ministry goal effectiveness shall be evaluated by the Admin. Team, or equivalent body, semi-annually thereafter.

D. The Admin. Team shall consider when to transition to a policy governance model (accountability leadership).

2. Intentional Faith Development and Leadership Development

Bible study and intentional training build on your foundation. They also encourage spiritual growth and build Christ-focused, biblically solid leaders. To build the church and support its stated mission, Northlawn shall implement the following:

- A. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, shall create an Intentional Faith Development Team (IFD) of 3-5 persons by **January 15, 2018**. The purpose of this team is to create an intentional faith development strategy

for on-going spiritual formation. This will move people from where they are on their spiritual journey to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The discipleship design will be a lifelong process for everyone, non-believers and those maturing in their faith.

- 1) The Intentional Faith Development plan shall be based on a Wesleyan model that encourages all persons:
 - to connect and grow 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; and
 - to be in service to others for the purpose of the mission of the church.
 - 2) Suggested resources are *A Disciple's Path* by James A. Harnish, *The Anatomy of a Disciple* by Brad Bell and Rick Taylor, and *Soul Revolution* by John Burke.
 - 3) The IFD plan will have multiple entry points so that there's a place for everyone. It will be fully implemented by **September 1, 2018**.
- B. The pastor shall recruit a 2-3 person Leadership Development Team (LDT) by **January 15, 2018**. This LDT will design an ongoing strategy for identifying, training, deploying leaders and supporting leaders through healthy accountability practices. Training models shall include both regular trainings and just-in-time trainings. The use of spiritual gifts inventories shall be a foundational part of this leadership development strategy. Beginning resources include effective congregations of similar size and the VCI faculty. The Leadership Development Plan will be implemented by **September 1, 2018**.

3. Stewardship

Biblical stewardship is foundational to a healthy congregation.

A. Financial Sustainability

- 1) The Finance Team shall implement the checks and balances of paragraph 258.4, of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, which include and are not limited to the following.
 - a) The chair of the Finance Team and Financial (Recording) Secretary shall not be the same person or be related to each other.
 - b) Follow through on your 2017 financial audit plan.
- ~~2) In response to new information regarding the expected 2017 revenue, research an amendment for ministry shares through the Conference Treasurer's Office by **February 19, 2017**.~~
- ~~3) Provide mandatory training for proficient use of accounting software as soon as possible and no later than **April 1, 2017**.~~
- 4) Develop a strategy for long term fiscal sustainability.
- 5) The Finance Team will join the Stewardship Team (named below) in using David Bell, Executive Director, United Methodist Foundation of Michigan, as a resource. This plan will be developed on or before **Oct 1, 2017**, with full implementation no later than **January 1, 2019**.
- 6) The finance team will support the stewardship strategy (see B below) and monitor expenses.

B. Stewardship

- 1) As a means of continuing the legacy of Northlawn United Methodist Church, the pastor, in consultation with the coach, will recruit a **Stewardship Team of 2-4 people** to create a culture of biblical stewardship by **Aug 1, 2017**.
- 2) Biblical stewardship encompasses prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Persons on this team shall include visionaries and out-of-the-box thinkers who understand the scope of biblical stewardship. The Stewardship Team shall be advised and evaluated by the Finance Team.
- 3) The Stewardship Team, in consultation with the pastor, will develop an annual strategy to move congregants from need-based giving to financial giving as an expression of faith in the resurrected Christ. This strategy shall include a variety of components such as an annual sermon series, all-church learning opportunities and monthly, personal "stewardship moments" during worship that illustrate how giving, volunteering, praying, serving, and witnessing have strengthened the faith of the speakers.
- 4) The Stewardship Team will join the Finance Team in using David Bell as a resource. The first annual strategy shall be implemented no later than **April 1, 2018**.

- C. In order to create a more welcoming and functional building interior, the Trustees will complete a building audit by **August 1, 2017**. The Trustees will start with the following:
- 1) Walk through the building to assess the extent of de-cluttering tasks.
 - 2) With the eye of a first-time guest, give special attention to the narthex, the communications area, children's worship bags and seasonal items.
 - 3) Repurpose or remove clutter throughout the facility.
 - 4) Remove the Sanctuary screen.

4. Relational and Community Outreach

Now is the time to move beyond transactional ministry to the community into relational ministry with your neighbors. It's not about waiting for something to happen; it's time to make it happen.

- A. ~~By **April 15, 2017**, the pastor, in consultation with the coach, will create an Outward Focus Team (OFT) of 3-5 people. The team's effectiveness depends on its passion for reaching the neighborhood.~~
- 1) ~~The congregation will study *Get Their Name* by Doug Anderson, Kay Kotan and Bob Farr. This study will conclude no later than **Memorial weekend, 2017**.~~
 - 2) The OFT and the Worship Strategy Team (see below) will review *MissionInsite* reports by **August 1, 2017**. A starting emphasis shall be given to the area defined by the boundaries of 4 Mile Road, Dean Lake Ave., Knapp St. and Plainfield Ave., and focusing on the top MOSAIC Lifestyle Segments of that defined area.
 - 3) Quarterly reaching out events may be formatted as bridge events with the sole purpose of getting to know and being known by the community. Bridge events are free of pressure, pocketbooks and pledges. No strings are attached to participating. The first of these events shall occur no later than **August 31, 2017**.
- B. Thereafter, the OFT will develop a comprehensive annual plan for the church's outreach ministries by **January 1, 2018**. This plan will ensure that outreach events are relational with well-defined goals and follow-through. In order to raise community awareness of Northlawn, Northlawn participants will wear specially designed shirts with the church name. At least some of the items given away generously will include the church's name, vision, website, and contact information, e.g. pencils, magnets, flying discs, etc. Resources include *Networking for People Who Hate Networking* by Devora Zack and *Just Walk Across the Room* by Bill Hybels.
- C. Designate a month in 2017 with an "Art of Neighboring" emphasis. This will include preaching, teaching, and practical steps for community neighboring. A suggested resource is *The Art of Neighboring* by Jay Pathak.
- D. The OFT will evaluate all outreach events for their effectiveness and explore ways to improve the next events. Resources include participant focus groups, volunteer focus groups, online surveys and the following questions.
- How can the church's outreach become invitational? (Such as Movie Night.)
 - How can outreach events that are merely monetary be converted into relational outreach?
 - How can the majority of the congregation take an active part in the out relational outreach events?
 - How can the church create and sustain outreach focused ministries?
 - How can we open our building to the community around us and be good stewards of the building? What local businesses and organizations need space to meet?

5. Worship

Now is the time to abandon personal preference for resolutely aligned disciple-making.

- A. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, shall create a Worship Strategy Team (WST) of 3-5 people (including himself) by **July 15, 2017**.
- 1) The WST, WDT (named in 'B.' below) and the OFT will review *MissionInsite* reports by **August 1, 2017**. A starting emphasis shall be given to the area defined by the boundaries of 4 Mile Road, Dean Lake Ave., Knapp St. and Plainfield Ave., and focusing on the top or largest MOSAIC Lifestyle Segment of that defined area.

- 2) Subsequently, the WST will review the NECM Community Survey Response and the Mystery Guest Report to become aware of the needs and interests of the community. This shall be complete no later than **August 1, 2017**.
 - 3) The WST and the WDT (named in 'B.' below) will research and discuss:
 - a. The worship components 'quality' and 'flow.' Resources include those of Marcia McFee, internet search 'worship flow' and <http://www.worshipteamcoach.com/blog/2015/04/01/worship-service-planning-five-rules-of-flow>.
 - b. Review 2-3 videos of Northlawn's worship to evaluate its quality and flow. This review will be completed by **September 1, 2017**.
 - 4) In consultation with the coach, the WST will determine the style of worship that aligns with the church's covenant, mission and vision and the needs or interests of the targeted demographic. This will be determined by **October 1, 2017**.
- B. The pastor, in consultation with the coach, will form a Worship Design Team (WDT) of 5-7 people, including the pastor by **July 15, 2017**.
- 1) This team will include, and not be limited to, those who are willing to learn or are gifted in music, technology, visual arts and verbal arts.
 - 2) The WDT will research, study and learn how best to design worship for the WST's chosen style. Suggested resources include: *The Book of Worship of The UMC*, *Worship Workshop* with Marcia McFee, *Deep And Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love To Attend* by Andy Stanley, *Lost And Found: The Younger Unchurched And The Churches That Reach Them* by Ed Stetzer and *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* by Constance Cherry.
 - 3) The WDT shall plan 4-6 weeks in advance to allow for intentional flow and create a warm and inviting worship space that manifests its design intent. This includes removing distracting or misfit items like the bell tables when not in use and other unrelated visuals.
 - 4) The team will visit and discuss observations of 2-3 healthy, vibrant churches reaching out to the WDT target demographic.
- C. The newly designed worship will be launched by **Advent, 2017**.
- D. The WDT will evaluate worship weekly beginning in **Advent, 2017**.
- E. Once the worship is proficient, the team, in consultation with the coach, shall begin to explore how to implement a second worship experience of a different style for a new lifestyle segment. The WDT will sign up for the REACH Network Group: How to Start New Service training. Other resources include, *How to Start a Second Service* by Charles Arn and *Launch* by Nelson Searcy. This second worship experience will begin no later than **January 2019**.

Conclusion

We, the Consultation Team, 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. May God give you courage and strength as you move forward.

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Town Hall Meeting Dates: Sunday, Jan. 29 @ 11 AM; Wednesday, Feb. 1 @ 1 PM; Monday, Feb. 6 @ 7 PM

Church Conference Date: Sunday, February 12, 2017 @ 11 AM

**Note: Prescription deadlines may be adjusted in consultation with the assigned VCI coach.*