



The Antioch Project

Barnabas Report

October 16th – 18th, 2015

Mount Zion United Methodist Church

Smiths Station, Alabama

The Alabama-West Florida Conference Barnabas Team would like to thank the Reverend Olivia Poole and the membership of Mount Zion United Methodist Church for your hospitality this weekend and for the privilege of partnering with you. Our prayer is that God will use this process to help the church focus the efforts of your congregation as you seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

This report lists several areas that the Barnabas Team identified as strengths over the course of our visit. We also list some areas where the church would like to see improvement. Finally, this report includes five recommendations from the Barnabas Team that we believe could revitalize the church for future ministry.

Strengths

1. We Celebrate Our Pastor.

Throughout our Barnabas Visit, church members celebrated the appointment of the Reverend Olivia Poole to Mount Zion. Reverend Poole brings a calming **pastoral leadership** to the church and is a good preacher, teacher and pastoral caregiver.

2. We Celebrate Our Property.

Mount Zion has a wonderful church property. The church **campus is beautiful** and spacious. The eight acre property is neatly landscaped and is a peaceful place to walk around on a nice day. The sanctuary is historic with beautiful stained glass windows. The property is also located in one of the fastest growing areas of the county and near a 7A high school.

3. We Celebrate Our People.

The people of Mount Zion have a deep commitment to the ministry of the church. Members give of their time, energy, and financial resources to help make sure that the church is able to continue in ministry. Everyone at **Mount Zion is family**, and this congregation is made up of people who truly love God and each other.

4. We Celebrate Christian Education.

Christian Education **groups are emerging** as some of the brightest places of ministry for Mount Zion. Adults celebrate Disciple Bible Studies, Sunday School, and the Women's Prayer Group. The children's ministry has seen new energy with new, young adult leadership. The youth group has also seen new life under youth director, Lucas Tribble (a.k.a. The Mustache Guy).

5. We Celebrate Hospitality.

Anyone who comes through the doors of Mount Zion will be loved. Over the course of the weekend, we heard several stories about how the church was there for people when they needed it most. This church has demonstrated a **deep compassion** for people and provides a place of love and healing for all.

Opportunities

1. Hide It Under a Bushel? No!

Mount Zion is in a great location just across from one of the fastest growing high schools in the state. However, there is a challenge with its location as the church is tucked away on the frontage road across from the railroad tracks and it is easy to drive by on the main road without noticing the church. People in the community do not know about Mount Zion UMC, making it **one of the best kept secrets in town**. Mount Zion needs to come out from under its bushel and shine for the community to see!

2. Let the Church Shine.

The Mount Zion property is beautiful, but the building could use some refurbishment to increase its curb appeal. The church desires to improve the property with fresh paint and new covers for the stained glass windows. The church signs are worn and outdated. The interior of the church is in much better shape, but also feels somewhat dated and could use renovations to really make the inside shine.

3. Shine to Our Community.

During the course of the weekend, we heard consistent themes that the church wants to reach out to the community to establish meaningful relationships. Activities such as Boy Scouts and the annual car show are great activities that currently do not make disciples of Jesus Christ. The church would like to invite participants in these activities to take deeper steps in their discipleship journeys.

4. Shine to Our Young People.

Another theme that the Barnabas Team heard was a desire to reach young adults, youth, and children. There are currently 2,123 adults between the ages of 24 and 35 who live within three miles of the church. 8% of these people prefer the United Methodist denomination and 17.5% have no religious preference. This means that more than five hundred 25-34 year old prospective members are living within three miles of the church.

Recommendations

1. Create a Driving Vision.

Zig Zigler is attributed with saying, “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.” This is just as true for churches as any other organization. Churches require a central mission that keeps all of its relationships, programs, and management headed in the same direction. With the help of a coach, Mount Zion will adopt new Mission, Vision, and Value Statements that will drive every decision of the church.

The church leadership will then undergo an audit of all ministry programs and resources (budgetary, personnel, financial, etc.) to help bring every aspect of Mount Zion in line with its new mission statement. All leadership committees and ministries of the church will spend at least five minutes at the beginning or end of every meeting to reflect on the mission statement and how their respective ministry areas will help the church accomplish its mission.

2. Create a New Image.

With the help of a coach, the pastor will convene a Communications Team to explore new ways to enhance public relations including the use of social media, email, and text messaging to help promote the church to the community.

The coach will also work with the Board of Trustees to improve the image of the church that is presented to the community. Within six months of adopting this report, the Trustees will hire professionals to complete the following projects:

- Paint the exterior of the church.
- Replace the plastic covers on the stained glass windows.
- Remove and/or replace outdated signs.
- Enhance the Landscaping around the Sanctuary.
- Replace the playground equipment.

A coach will also guide the church in the process of creating a long range plan that will include:

- A plan to renovate and update the interior of the church.
- An overall plan for the entire 8 acres of the property .

In order to better relate to the community, the Church Council will work with the coach to consider changing the name of the church. If it decides to proceed with changing the name, the Church Council will follow the required procedures to bring it before the church for a vote. If a new name is

chosen, the church will create a new brand around this name that will be reflected on the website, social media, letterhead, new signage, and all other publications for the church.

3. Create New Opportunities for New People.

The members of Mount Zion have demonstrated a deep compassion for those who are hurting. The church rallies around these individuals with a ministry of hope and healing. The community needs this ministry! Upon accepting this report, the pastor will convene a Community Opportunities Team that will work with a coach to explore creating new opportunities for new people, such as:

- New small groups
- Celebrate Recovery (A recovery ministry for people with hurts, habits, and hang-ups)
- Modern Worship
- Fresh Expressions of Church (A small group ministry that seeks to launch new ways of doing church)

4. Create an Intentional Discipleship Pathway.

With the help of a coach, Mount Zion will establish an intentional discipleship plan that will create a pathway for people to grow in discipleship from the moment they are a first time visitor of the church all the way to being an active, core member. This plan will include:

- At least one major community connection event that will serve as a portal ministry to create relationships with new people.
- A system for following up with visitors and inviting them into deeper participation in the church.
- A plan to track worship attendance and follow up with persons who have missed three Sundays in a row.
- An intentional plan for inviting all members and each person who has visited the church or church activity to join a small group (whether Sunday school, a weeknight group, or home group). This will require periodically beginning short-term small groups to create opportunities for new people.
- A system for inviting all people to serve the church and the community in ways that fit with their gifts, talents, and passion.

5. Be Creative in Worship.

The worship service at Mount Zion is good, but could be more intentional about welcoming new generations of Christians. Upon accepting this report, the pastor will work with a coach and worship team to enhance the worship service in ways to offer hospitality to new generations of people. Worship may be planned in such a way as to incorporate some modern elements even while staying true to our ancient traditions.

Immediate Decision Steps

The congregation will hold **two Town Hall Meetings** to discuss these recommendations on:

Sunday, October 25th at 3:00
Sunday, November 15th at 3:00

Facilitators for these Town Hall Meetings will be identified by the pastor in conjunction with the Barnabas Team.

The **congregation will vote on this report** at an official **church conference** led by the district superintendent on:

If approved by a **70% or more vote** of the official membership present, the Alabama-West Florida Conference will designate coaches and partner with the church to implement these recommendations.

If the recommendations are rejected, the Antioch Project partnership process will cease.

Respectfully Submitted by:

- Rev. Dr. Robbins Sims, District Superintendent, Montgomery-Opelika District
- Mr. Tom Hunt, President, PHD Hotels
- Rev. Dan Pezet, Director of Congregational Vitality