



State of the Church 2019

Each year, in assessing the state of Salem, we take a look at some benchmark statistics. As of the end of 2018 our membership now includes 276 professing adults. We also have 70 baptized infants and children— so 346 total.

This past year 3 members died, and we received 16 new members. That means we have received 130 new members since arriving at our current location a little over eight years ago!

Additionally, we have 83 active non-members. So we could say we actually have 429 people who are a part of Salem, however, it's likely the case that we have an equal amount of our members who are inactive. It's unfortunate when members become inactive. We have to spend time and energy to help them become active again or to withdraw their membership, since they're not upholding their membership vows.

One of the important things we did this past year was hire more staff, getting the right people in the right positions to lead ministries and people. This was part of our goal to implement a staff re-organizational structure. Some are paid and some unpaid. Paid staff, other than our administrative assistant, range from 1/8 to 1/4 time. So we are starting small. New staff this past year include Andy Knapp, Student Ministry Director; Tim King, Discipleship Director; Jodi Anderson, who was hired for two positions: Worship Coordinator and Service Coordinator; and Scott Shaffer, Custodian.

In addition to the great team we have in place, we are now looking to hire a *Community Ambassador* this year, helping us reach people outside the church building in our community. We also are seeing the need for leaders in the areas of children's ministry and hospitality.

As part of our mission to make disciples of Jesus who make a difference in the world, we essentially carry out four actions: reaching out, connecting, forming, and sending.



Reach. This is the intentional action to get to those outside the church. It's not waiting for people to come, but rather going as a missionary to them. Our Outreach Team helps us reach out to others with activities such as our Easter Egg Hunt, Trunk or Treat, Cleaning Up Cancer Carnival, Valentine's Project, and many more. Again this past year, hundreds and hundreds of people came out especially for our Easter Egg Hunt and Trunk or Treat. That's fantastic, but we need to reach out deeper into our community. This is where a Community Ambassador could help us greatly. Reaching out to the vast majority of people who are outside the church building is one of the most important things we do.

That begins with all of us being in relationship with friends, colleagues, and neighbors and engaging them about what they believe and inviting them to church to experience God. I'm grateful for all of our members who have done that this past year and brought new people to connect with us. Well done!



Connect. After we reach new people, we want to connect with them and then lead them to commit their lives to Jesus through baptism and profession of faith, if that hasn't already happened.

This past year, fewer people have been participating in Connecting Point and Connect, the process we created to assimilate newcomers. We intend to change that by connecting with our newcomers individually and then inviting them to a revamped Connecting Point small group to help them connect with Salem.

Last year we celebrated 1 baptism. Of our 16 new members, 3 were by profession of faith (several others made professions of faith during the year apart from membership). Baptisms and professions of faith are key indicators, showing us how many *new* Christians we are reaching and connecting to the church.

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Form. This is the intentional action to shape and nurture others to become like Jesus, especially with worship and spiritual disciplines. Our worship attendance averaged 198 this past year, a slight decrease from 203 the previous year. This is, however, the second year we have experienced a downturn in worship participation. Attendance has declined by 12 in the past two years.

Even if we don't account for our active non-members but do account for those who might be sick or out of town any given week, Salem should still have 300 people in worship regularly—even more with our active non-members and guests. That's a hundred more than our average.

While physical attendance decreased, online attendance increased significantly. This is new for us. We've had audio on our website for years, but in October we started doing a Facebook Live video. Our Annual Conference now asks that we keep track of this in addition to physical attendance. Since we began, our online attendance average is 98. We're just beginning. We can grow a lot in this important way to connect with people.

We also have more significant growth with 370 children, youth, and adults who participated in some kind of small group. This is a big increase over 202 the previous year. This relationship with others in community is vital as we are formed to be like Jesus.

Our giving was down in 2018. Whereas in 2017 we received \$300,000, in 2018 we received \$273,000. This is a significant decrease of \$27,000. We did end the year with \$1,146 over our expenses, however, we were only able to pay 40% of our apportionments instead of our 70% goal. If we had paid 70% we would have ended \$10,000 in the red.

This past year was a downturn financially. Years like this happen from time to time, but we need to work on funding our ministry better, growing in our giving. We're struggling to get to \$300,000 in giving when we could give close to \$1 million if we took seriously giving in proportion to our income. Of course, we don't know everyone's income, but the median income in Cedar Rapids is about \$55,000 and we have about 180 giving units. Tithing, giving 10% or \$5,500 would bring

\$990,000. Of course, some make more and some less, some are able to give more and some less, and many are not tithing. But if we averaged even 5% it would likely still be \$495,000.

We get closer to that amount when we include what was given for our building (\$79,000) and mission projects (\$20,000). But our giving is still about \$125,000 less than what it should be and hundreds of thousands less than what it could be.

Can you imagine what we could do if we funded our ministry like that? Yes, of course, we could pay staff and quickly pay off our mortgage (now under \$1 million), but more importantly, we could make so much more of a difference in the world with this kind of intentional giving. Please do the math so you know how much you give in proportion to your income.



Send. After reaching people, connecting and forming them, we intentionally send people outside the church again, bringing the process full circle back to "reach." This time, though, as we go out we do good and make a difference in the world.

In addition to our regular giving, we gave about \$24,268 to apportionments, supporting the ministry and mission of The United Methodist Church beyond the local church here and around the world. We also supported our own mission projects, financially and tangibly. With our monthly mission focuses, we gave blessing bags for shelters, school and health kits, hats and mittens, and children's books, as well as \$20,000 for mission projects beyond Salem, locally and globally.

There are many of us individually who serve many different places beyond the wall of Salem. We also have a few specific places where together we have given our time and help to our community: serving meals at Green Square on Thursdays, reading with children in local schools, and serving with Matthew 25 in one of their many projects.

Our goal in reaching out to new people, connecting them to Jesus and the body of Christ, and forming them in the way of Jesus, is to send them into the world to live lives of love, justice, beauty, and service, making a difference in this world that God so loves. Like our financial giving, .

Perhaps we just need better organization. Our new Service Coordinator, Jodi Anderson, is in place to help us discover our spiritual gifts and find a place to serve in the church and beyond in the world. Where are you serving at Salem and beyond in the world?

Looking ahead. The reality is that we are facing changes ahead. The world behind us is much different than the world ahead of us. And the special General Conference at the end of February could potentially bring change to The United Methodist Church and therefore to Salem.

This “state of the church” reveals that in some ways we have grown and been quite fruitful while in other ways we have struggled. That’s okay. Participating in God’s mission is a journey. There is nothing more important on the face of the earth. We aren’t merely about propping up an organization. We are the church, the body of Christ, proclaiming all that God has done in Jesus. We are God’s plan for blessing this world that God created, for showing the world how to live, and for helping to make the world good again as it was in the original creation.

Thank you for being a part of Salem! Would you consider where you are engaged in all of this? How are you reaching out to others to invite them to Salem? What is your habit of gathering for worship? Where are you connected in a small group? What percentage of your income are you giving? How are you serving in the church and beyond in the world? We are the body of Christ together. We are Jesus in the world, and this is a grand adventure.

Grace and peace to you,

John Louk