

June 7, 2018

Vision Team Report on Mt. Sylvan United Methodist Church's Future: Summary

Dear Friends,

In early 2016 the congregation entered a time of **Discovery**. In that process we shared our thoughts about different areas of our ministry together here at Mt Sylvan. We discovered that we are at our best when we are serving the community, taking care of each other, and inviting everyone to be a part of our church family. We feel the Spirit when we can use our gifts and receive the gifts inside and outside of our church. We feel spiritually nurtured through the spoken word and as we experience and share care and concern among our church family. Lastly, we would be missed for our missions, fellowship, care concern, and worship. These discoveries are the basis for the core values for our congregation.

With this Discovery of who we say we are as the body of Christ in this place, the Vision Team has endeavored to discern through prayer and God's grace to **Dream**. To dream about all the ways we see God at work in our midst, to explore the possibilities of and prayerfully consider more ways that it is felt we are being led to serve, and to improve our discipleship of the ministries we currently undertake. The team has faithfully prayed for God's leadership and talked amongst themselves and others in the congregation. Our one and only goal is that we be increasingly committed to live further into our congregational and personal commitment to be Disciples of Jesus Christ, with all that requires of us.

Since those early days, the Vision Team has met many times, discussing each facet of our Ministry in great depth. We found that as a body, we are passionate about being in ministry of Jesus Christ. In each element we found that the congregation is generous with your time, gifts, and resources. The Outreach Ministries are embracing multiple opportunities to serve others outside of the immediate church community. Though we assist many of our community, in many ways, our challenge is beyond the temporal assistance we give others. The goal is to incorporate sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all with whom we serve. The Vision Team has affirmed that we are aggressively seeking to grow spiritually, to a significant level. It is believed that though this is evident, each of us has a responsibility to become more engaged in and persevere in prayerfully seeking the perfection that each of us are striving for in our discipleship of Jesus.

All of this being said, how is it envisioned that we will be enabled to achieve the goals God has laid before us? The third and next part of our journey together requires that we **Design** a means whereby we can embrace the Dream to make them become reality, with faithful prayer and God's guidance. The Vision Team has discerned that we must have specific, measurable actions. Some are easily achieved; others may require significant investments of money and time. For some that may be a challenge; it will require a deeper trust and earnest prayer that God can and will lead us to achieve the goals He has laid before us. God's challenge for us is to prayerfully seek His guidance in all ministries that we have undertaken and will undertake in the future. To excel in each ministry endeavor through prayer, and the commitment of each of us as disciples of Jesus Christ. Praying that

God will guide us, using the gifts and graces that have been bestowed to us, individually and collectively as the body of Christ in this place. To help us in this endeavor to Design, we have this document to guide our efforts.

Destiny is the final phase, where we put our ideas into action. Destiny creates a community buy-in in which the foundational elements of the Vision are shared and embraced, and the values become part of our decision-making and discernment process.

The Vision Team Report gives a more detailed account of the journey through the Discovery of our core values and the Dreams we have for our future. The report contains examples of proposals. This is the heart of our next step, to put in writing your ideas for moving forward a core value for implementation into the life of the church. Guidance is provided on how to present your idea as a written proposal. There will be announced workshops to help you prepare an idea for consideration. We need your prayerful discernment and enthusiastic energy to bring forward ideas for the future of Mt. Sylvan. It is your task to take up the future of our church through the discernment of God's will. Therefore, it is in Jesus name we commit ourselves to aggressively seek to achieve the goals set before us.

The Vision Team

Vision Team Report

Introduction

The Mt. Sylvan Church Vision Team began meeting in February of 2016. With the assistance of two congregational coaches supplied by the North Carolina Annual Conference, we engaged in a process to determine who we are (our vision) and to begin to look toward the future in ministries based upon our vision (our mission).

Appreciative Inquiry, a way of assessing organizations and communities that seeks to highlight strengths and build upon them, informed the process we have used. Appreciative Inquiry assumes that the questions we ask help create the answers, and so we have spent many months attempting to formulate questions and shape a perspective that seeks to uncover our strengths and core values, so that we may align our ministries in the future with the best of who we are.

The process included a series of meetings with groups: Sunday School classes, worship attendees, youth, church leaders, as well as the rank and file of the church. Each were asked questions; the answers became part of the process of Discovery, and led to the formulation of our core values and strengths.

Discovery included questions about our current context for ministry. What is our neighborhood like? Who is it that we are called to serve? Discovery also included the gathering of demographic information about the future of our community and expected changes in population.

Discovery leads to **Dreaming**. The Vision Team spent many hours discussing what, based on our core values, God could be calling us to do. This phase requires a disciplined imagination of what could be, if resources were not an issue. From a long list of possible future projects and ministries, the Team began to focus on a select few.

Dreaming is the process whereby we become more of who we are, and out of that strength, offer our ministry to the community. It does not mean that we would restrict or ignore the Holy Spirit leading us to new paths or projects or ministries, but it does mean our values inform what we do. Does this align with our values? Will it help us become more of who we believe we are? Is God growing a new value or strength in us to share with others?

After we dream, we **Design**. Specific, measurable actions are proposed. Some of them are easily achieved; others may require significant investments of money and time, a stretch for us without trusting in the power of God. We might seek other partners, or engage in a process of development of resources to accomplish these goals.

Destiny is the commitment to the plan, and the final movement of the process. Destiny creates a community “buy-in” in which the foundational elements of the Vision are shared and embraced, and the values become part of our decision-making and discernment process. The asking of great questions to make us stronger (instead of focusing on what we don’t have or who we are not) should become part of the culture of the congregation.

Part 1 - Discovery: Core Values

The Vision Team identified five core values, or strengths, through the process of Discovery. These values are what give Mt. Sylvan its unique identity, and form the basis for its mission and ministry. Alignment between the way Mt. Sylvan understands itself, its values and its ministries can mean increased vitality and faithfulness overall throughout the life of the church.

Tradition

In nearly every in-depth discussion of the nature of Mt. Sylvan, this value was present. As a church founded in 1885, with descendants of the original founding families still an active part of the church family, tradition emerged as a value underlying nearly everything else we are and do. Tradition as we understand it, however, does not mean an anchor to a past that is no longer relevant. It means a body of wisdom and a set of practices that can inform, teach and invite a new generation of Christians into a life of holiness and service to God.

Generosity

Mt. Sylvan is filled with generous people, who give of their money and time to serve God and neighbor. Example after example of amazing generosity led the Vision Team to quickly identify this as a very strong core value. We share what God has given, and we do so with the least and the lost. One has only to ask, and the generous people of Mt. Sylvan respond.

Care

Care for each other, and for the community, is expressed in a number of concrete ways. Person after person has shared with the Team how they felt supported and cared for throughout their lives, especially during times of loss. Some have borne witness to the importance of such care by calling it “life-saving”.

Outreach

Mt. Sylvan reaches outside the church to offer ministries of real help and hope in the community. This value guides us to offer and participate in an ever-increasing number of opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others.

Growth

Mt. Sylvan has evidenced a deep commitment to a way of discipleship that encourages everyone to grow in the knowledge and love of God. This value is at the heart of who God is, because God always has more to show and share. We expect to grow to be more faithful and to grow as a community in every way.

Part 2 – Dream

As the Vision Team moved to the Dream phase, the process of Discovery by identifying core strengths and values continued to evolve and guide them. This phase was difficult. It required long meetings and conversations which seemed to cover ground we had already covered. What emerged, however, was a sense in which Mt. Sylvan was at a crossroads. The decisions made now will have an impact for many years to come. Our conversations revealed a shared understanding and hope:

Mt. Sylvan will be a welcoming, inclusive, growing church that is known in the community and makes a difference.

This vision was informed by a sociological change noted in our learning: where once people sought God and found community in church, now they seek community and find God. Members of the team dreamed of a vital and lively congregation that is diverse and not afraid to take risks. Hospitality would become a central practice of our church, and we would commit resources to creating a climate of connection and welcoming.

We would become better known in the community by raising our profile, using social media and building relationships with other churches and community partners. Community based events that speak to life issues and would become a hallmark of our ministry. Our missional outreach would be known by our relational and interactive approach: mission with, instead of to.

Spiritual Formation and Education would reach into the community and offer the de-churched, unchurched and even those who do not identify with any religious affiliation (known as nones) opportunities to experience the depth and power of Christian spirituality and learning for life. Welcoming, vital, growing, diverse and inclusive. This is the future for Mt. Sylvan Church.

Part 3 - Design

Now it is your turn to take up the future of our church through the discernment of God's will. What has been put on your heart, what idea do you have, what improvement would you make? Take that thought or idea and put it into writing. Think through the issues. You don't need to be the expert and have it all figured out. Just provide a sketch of your vision that helps others to see and hold a discussion on your idea. To have specific, measurable actions, a protocol has been developed for you to use as a guide to describe your idea. Some ideas are easily achieved; others may require significant investments of money and time, but both are welcomed.

Guidance is provided on how to present your idea as a written proposal. The proposal protocol provides guidance on what information to provide. There is an example of a Design proposal for you to use as a guide. There will be announced workshops to help you prepare an idea for consideration. You can bring your idea forward at these workshops, and we will help you think it through. We might seek other partners or engage in a process of development of resources to accomplish these goals.

This is the next great step for the Vision Process. The church needs your prayerful discernment and enthusiastic energy to bring forward ideas for the future of Mt. Sylvan.

Protocol for preparation of a Proposal

This is a guide to help you prepare a sketch outline of your idea, not a fully formed implementation plan. The proposal gives enough information to guide a conversation to determine if the idea has merit. If the Administrative Council judges the proposal worthy to move on, then a more detailed plan can be prepared. Below is guidance on what to write in each section of the proposal.

Proposal for: *insert a short descriptive title*

Goal: *how will this reflect and enhance the core values*

Specific measurable actions: *what can be measured to indicate the success of this proposal*

Short Description: *provide a paragraph or two that explains how your proposal will work, who will benefit, who will do the work, what is needed, and any costs to implement.*

List of specific measurable actions under each of the five core values: *see below*

Tradition: *how will your proposal further the core value of tradition?*

Generosity: *how will your proposal further the core value of generosity?*

Care: *how will your proposal further the core value of care?*

Outreach: *how will your proposal further the core value of outreach?*

Growth: *how will your proposal further the core value of growth?*

Oversight: *specify a committee that is best suited to provide oversight for your proposal*

Proposal Template

Proposal for:

Goal:

Specific measurable actions:

Short Description:

List of impacts under each of the five core values:

Tradition:

Generosity:

Care:

Outreach:

Growth:

Oversight:

Part 4 - Destiny

This is the final phase, where we put your proposals into action. You did the hard-work and developed a proposal, followed it through the vetting process to seek Administrative Council approval. The incorporation of feedback from others strengthened your plan and prepared it for adoption. Then we roll out your idea to congregation and celebrate God's will acting through you.