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## **Study Committee on Purchasing a Parsonage**

### **Report to Charge Conference**

March 20, 2020

### **History and Overview of the Committee's Responsibility**

In February 2020, the Board of Trustees ("Trustees") of Wahoo First United Methodist Church ("Wahoo First UMC") created this Parsonage Task Force to investigate options and formulate a plan to provide a parsonage that means the Parsonage Standards of the Great Plains Annual Conference, either through remodeling of the existing parsonage, purchasing or building a new one, or providing a housing allowance to the pastor.

The Task Force was assembled to address the housing needs of the pastor's family. When it was announced that the pastor's family would be welcoming twins in the summer, this group was put together to create a plan to bring the current parsonage up to the conference's Parsonage Standards, primarily by finishing two bedroom spaces in the basement to provide the requisite three finished bedrooms in accordance with the Standards. In the course of creating that plan, it was also determined that other work, such as adding insulation and performing electrical and other testing, would be required. The preliminary costs of those repairs and improvements likely exceeds \$20,000. At that point, the Task Force began investigating the possibility of purchasing a new parsonage, and the Task Force's purpose changed to its current format, the Study Committee on Purchasing a Parsonage. For reasons listed in this report, it is this committee's strong recommendation that Wahoo First UMC look into purchasing a new parsonage. Because of the limited timeline to complete the needed repairs in the current parsonage before the birth of the pastor's twins, a charge conference needed to be scheduled quickly to consider this recommendation.

Following this recommendation, and pursuant to ¶2544.1 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, this committee is tasked with create a report that would: (1) analyze the needs of the church and community; (2) project the potential membership with average attendance; and (3)

write up the church's program of ministry.<sup>1</sup> This report serves as the fulfillment of the requirements of those requirements.

## **Analyze the Needs of the Church and Community**

The needs of the church and community are, at an existential level, to know and rely on God's grace. Specifically, Wahoo First UMC needs clergy and lay leadership that can provide clear, ongoing leadership that satisfies that primary need. A congregation that is close to celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Wahoo First UMC has a need to honor its historic legacy while also safeguarding its future impact upon the community. The church also has a need to create a plan to provide adequate space to the growing needs of the congregation, in terms of worship space, fellowship and small group space, and space for child and youth programming.

As a community, the City of Wahoo (and by extension Saunders County) needs a vital, enduring Christian witness from its churches, of which Wahoo First UMC is an historic member. Many of the needs of the community, from food security and other socioeconomic concerns, to community cohesion and spiritual support, have been and are being met by Wahoo First UMC.

Part of the Wahoo First UMC's strategy to meet the needs of ongoing clergy leadership and community cohesion is by providing the pastor of Wahoo First UMC with a parsonage. This committee believes that these needs would continue to be met most effectively by providing a parsonage. Due to the relative instability of Wahoo's real estate market, as well as to Wahoo's relative proximity to both the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan areas, it is foreseeable that future pastors at Wahoo First UMC would choose to live outside of the community. This would decrease the pastoral family's connection to the community, the pastor's ability to relate to the congregation, and the pastor's ability to be a presence in the community. For those reasons, this committee believes it is advisable for the church to continue providing a parsonage.

Currently, that parsonage is located on a lot adjacent to the church, such that it is a contiguous property. Purchasing a new parsonage in a new location would provide several tangible benefits both to the church and to the pastor's family. It would provide increased privacy to the pastor's family, as well as helping the pastor to better practice Sabbath, by decreasing the overlap between the spheres of work and home. For the church, purchasing a new parsonage with newer amenities would help the church be a more attractive appointment for district superintendents considering potential pastors for the church. Additionally, this decision would open up many possibilities of expansion for its facilities. Ideas which have been brought up for the use of the current parsonage space include:

1. Utilizing the home as meeting or small group space;
2. Converting the space to provide mission or outreach to community members in need;

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<sup>1</sup> The fourth task of the study committee, to "develop an accessibility plan including chancel areas" does not apply to this committee, as no worship areas are considered in the proposal.

3. Renting the home to provide supplemental income for the church;
4. Selling or removing the home, to provide space for increased parking or fellowship space.

These ideas can be made at a later date and after further consideration. This committee does not take a position on these options. Nevertheless, for these reasons the committee recommends purchasing a parsonage off-site from the current facilities of Wahoo First UMC.

### **Project the Potential Membership with Average Attendance**

According to Wahoo First UMC's most recent statistical report to the annual conference, the current membership of the church is 289. According to an executive summary produced by VitalSigns, the average weekly worship attendance of Wahoo First UMC in 2019 was 110. This represents a stabilization of a recent years-long trend of steadily declining worship attendance.

At the annual church conference on November 5, 2019, the church cast a vision to have an average weekly attendance of 150 by 2024. While this is an ambitious goal, it is certainly achievable with God's help. The City of Wahoo is growing, due in large part to an influx of younger families moving to Wahoo to provide a small-town living experience while one or both parents commutes to Omaha or Lincoln for work. Were the church to maintain its commitment to our mission to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," it can be reasonably expected that the church will grow toward this goal. In the coming weeks, the church will welcome several families into church membership, including some by baptism and profession of faith. This is matched by our church's planned formation of a new mid-week ministry, which will welcome several unchurched members of our community into a time of fellowship and discipleship, with an eye toward worship attendance and church membership.

The church also set a goal of having three Fresh Expressions, or new non-traditional worshipping communities, by 2024, above its current offering of one Fresh Expression. This commitment also carries with it a reasonable expectation that the average attendance will increase, followed by an increase in church membership. With a projected average attendance of 150, it can be reasonably inferred that the church membership will grow toward 350.

### **Write Up the Church's Program of Ministry**

Wahoo First UMC has a program of ministry that seeks to encompass all aspects of the Christian life. This program includes many groups and venues that are currently offered, as well as ministries that are planning to be offered in the near future. This committee, in consultation with the Pastor, compiled the following list of our ministry programs.

The current ministries offered are:

### *Worship*

- **Praise Service** – Sundays, 9:00am – contemporary worship service
- **Traditional Service** – Sundays, 10:30am – traditional worship service
- **South Haven Service** – Mondays, 1:30pm – “Fresh Expression” ministry offered in a long-term care facility
- **Special/Holiday Services** – regular services for Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunrise, and Christmas Eve

### *Equip*

- **Sunday School** – Sundays, 9:00am – Sunday school for children and youth
- **Youth** – Wednesdays, 6:00pm – weekly Youth fellowship and discipleship
- **Special Bible Studies** – regular Bible studies in the seasons of Lent and Advent
- **Friends in Faith** – Wednesdays, 3:30pm – weekly after-school ministry for elementary students
- **Vacation Bible School** – weeklong summer program for elementary students
- **Financial Peace University** – periodic classes on financial management
- **New Member Class** – class offered periodically for those wishing to join the church

### *Connect*

- **Fellowship** – Sundays, 10:00am – weekly fellowship time in-between services
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** – Tuesdays, 8:30am – weekly fellowship for those in recovery from alcohol use disorder
- **Growing in Grace** – monthly fellowship for women of any age
- **Senior Moments** – monthly fellowship for those over 60
- **Lunch Bunch** – Mondays, 11:30am – weekly group that rotates between Wahoo’s restaurants
- **Walkers & Talkers** – Thursdays, 7:00am – weekly group that meets to walk in or around the church in fellowship
- **Open Mic Night** – periodic community event offered in partnership with a local coffee shop
- **Farmers Market** – weekly farmers market offered in our parking lot during the summer
- **Trunk or Treat** – annual Halloween event put on for children in the church and community
- **Soup Supper & Silent Auction** – annual supper and auction held in conjunction with the city’s Christmas tree lighting ceremony

### *Serve*

- **Ushers & Greeters** – weekly volunteers who help greet and usher during the worship services
- **Funeral Team** – group that provides funeral meals and hosting during memorial services at the church
- **Scripture Readers** – rotation of laypeople to read Scripture during weekly worship services

- **Community Garden** – summer garden available for church members to grow various plants and produce, as well as provide extra produce to community members
- **Food Pantry** – operated by the Saunders County Ministerial Association, this food pantry is open to any county resident in need

In addition to these current ministries, Wahoo First UMC is planning to begin the following new ministries:

- **Mid-Week Programming** – this weekly ministry will provide a meal, fellowship, and discipleship programming for all ages in the church
- **The OneEvent** – in June 2020, Wahoo First UMC will be a host site for this conference youth event, where youth will spend a week engaged in mission work around the community
- **Community Garden** – expand the Community Garden to include more features, such as a lending library

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Wahoo First UMC is a growing church with a rich history and a vibrant future. The City of Wahoo is a growing, vibrant community that will allow for a sustainable, vibrant Methodist presence. Several ongoing ministries of the church are being strengthened, and several new ministries are being formulated. The ministries will effectively use the church's existing facilities, and additional facilities may be needed as the church meets its growth goals.

Relevant to the purposes of this committee, it is in the church's best interest to provide an attractive parsonage for the pastor's family, so that the housing would reflect the positive, upward trajectory of the church. Additionally, moving the parsonage away from the current location would allow for various options to better meet the needs of the church and community.

Therefore, it is the strong recommendation of this committee that the charge conference look into purchasing a new parsonage, authorizing the Board of Trustees to follow their directive, at a location and price determined by the charge conference and in consultation with the pastor, district superintendent, and district committee on building and location.