

Consultation Report for First United Methodist Church Lufkin

INTRODUCTION

We, the consultation team, would like to thank Pastor Jerome Brimmage, the Lay Leadership and the congregation of First United Methodist Church of Lufkin, Texas for the invitation to consult with your church as part of the Vibrant Church Initiative. The observations and prescriptions in this report are the result of this team studying the following information:

- FUMC Lufkin self-study document provided by its leaders
- Interviews with pastor, staff and lay leadership
- A focus group with members of the congregation
- A meeting with the Ad Council
- A MissionInsite demographic report of the area's population
- Input from the Faith Perceptions "Mystery Guest Worshipper" report
- Input from Saturday's leadership workshop

It was a great joy to work with a congregation that openly cooperated with us and provided all the information we requested. The consultation team's prayer is that God will use this assessment experience and consultation report so that FUMC Lufkin will more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of its community and the world.

STRENGTHS

STRENGTH #1

First United Methodist Church of Lufkin exhibits genuine care for one another and their community. Many people expressed a deep and abiding love for one another, which was also experienced by many of the mystery guests. One first time attender said *"everyone including the pastor was loving and welcoming. I felt like they knew me; I wasn't a stranger. They were truly sincere and loving."*

STRENGTH #2

First United Methodist Church of Lufkin has an awareness of the demographic and cultural changes that are going on in Lufkin. We heard evidence of an openness in the congregation's attitudes towards those who appear different from themselves. Several persons reiterated the theme, *"we need to learn how to bring in people who don't look like us."*

STRENGTH #3

Members expressed a deep understanding of calling to make a difference in their community in the name of Christ. Many leaders in the church are also leaders in the community and the campus of the church is used almost every day of the week not only by members but for the benefit of the community. For example, when especially large funerals are held in the Lufkin

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area, the facilities of FUMC Lufkin are often used with church members providing hospitality and support.

STRENGTH #4

Mystery guests indicated that both traditional and contemporary worship services were excellent. They indicated that the entire worship experience including music, sermons and feelings of spiritual depth were meaningful. *“I felt welcomed and I loved the message from the pastor. Overall, the service was great! The acceptance was far more than expected. Several members asked how I enjoyed the service and welcomed me back.”*

STRENGTH #5

First United Methodist Church of Lufkin has a strong and enviable Wesleyan legacy as a valued part of the Texas Annual Conference. There is a faithful core of members and leaders committed to discovering how to live out their next steps in the 21st century. Over the years, many of the leaders said there has been growth in the character of the congregation. *“We used to pay people to do things, now we do things – in service, outreach and caring.”* In addition, many leaders felt that over the years the focus of the church had changed in a faithful way. *“Back then, it was wonderful, but everything was just about us. Now, we are more concerned about the community.”*

CONCERNS

CONCERN #1

The alignment of values, vision and mission is essential to the health and growth of the people of God in a community. Members stated there is little shared sense of mission and vision. One person said, *“The congregation and the staff need to be reminded why the church is present. Remember: Jesus is Present.”* Several members said the church was doing many good things, but activities are neither unified nor coordinated and all the activities of the church need to be built around a common purpose and goal. *“Without a vision the people perish”* (Proverbs 29:18).

CONCERN #2

The leadership is not playing as one team. *“Conversations are not always tactful, open or transparent”* one member said. Some decisions are felt by many to be delayed, distrusted, difficult, painful and just plain hurtful to some. Several members said there needs to be less micromanagement and more empowerment of the laity. Several leaders noted that there may be a confusion of leadership styles. *“We have been ‘congregation led’, but for at least the last ten years we have switched to be more pastor/staff led. Pastors and staff are wonderful, and we need them, but WE THE PEOPLE have to take responsibility for the church, rather than simply*

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expecting pastors and staff to get it done and then blaming them for everything that is wrong.” Another added “VCI gives us the chance to affirm our pastors and staff while moving to a more ‘congregation led’ model.”

CONCERN #3

First United Methodist Church Lufkin does not reflect its mission field. This concern was expressed in almost every interview. There was a mystery guest who said, *“no one looked just like me.”* Multiple groups on Saturday expressed a concern that *“we need to be inclusive and welcome diversity.”* One member said, *“The demographics of our church don’t mirror Lufkin. This will help us bring more people and revitalize the church. I hope we evolve to something more.”*

CONCERN #4

There are broken relationships in the past and present. First United Methodist Church Lufkin has struggled to effectively deal with issues and reconciliation. One member said, *“we need to get rid of the negativity and critical spirit.”* Another said, *“we need people to be honest and stop the gossip. We need to stop the pot stirrers and get people to voice their opinions but value others’ opinions.”* Several said it is time for less complaining and more encouragement.

CONCERN #5

Hospitality and assimilation are necessary for the future of the congregation’s health. The church is not positioned to effectively welcome or involve new persons into the church. Nine mystery guests gave contact information and only ½ received follow up contact. Multiple mystery guests reported having great difficulty navigating the campus. Most of them had no idea where to worship, where to park, or where to find the nursery/children’s area. In addition, a number of members commented that the facilities desperately need updating. One said, *“I am nervous about bringing visitors because our buildings are so out of date that the last time I did the visitor asked, ‘Are you all in great financial difficulty?’”* At one community funeral, women attending had to be directed all over the campus to find sufficient restroom space. Another leader said, *“Some of our buildings do not just need redecoration, they need renovation or replacement.”*

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PRESCRIPTIONS:

In order to address the above concerns, FUMC Lufkin will do the following:

Focus Mission: On the day, this consultation report is accepted, to help build on its momentum, the congregation will take as its mission statement: *“Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”* This means that every ministry in the congregation must demonstrate how it will accomplish the mission and that new ministries need to have as their primary purpose “making disciples of Jesus Christ.”

A Day of Prayer and Renewal: The congregation will have a service of prayer and renewal to embrace God breaking open the hearts of the congregation for the unchurched. The service will allow the membership to be fully prepared for God’s vision for the future. The service will be led by a person to be selected by the Center for Congregational Excellence. The Day of Prayer and Renewal will take place on or before **September 29, 2019.**

PRESCRIPTION #1 – VISION, VALUES & STRUCTURE

The Coach, along with a specialist designated by the Center for Congregational Excellence, will conduct a Day of Visioning workshop. The purpose of this day is to dream of how God might work through the congregation both individually and collectively to reach the local mission field by clarifying congregational identity and purpose. This workshop will occur on or before **October 26, 2019.** Pre-workshop homework will be completed two weeks prior.

Following the Day of Visioning, the VCI Team and Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will:

- Appoint a Vision discernment team consisting of 5-7 people on or before **November 15, 2019** and
- Define a Vision capturing the uniqueness of FUMC Lufkin. This will be presented to the Church Council on or before **April 28, 2020.**
- The vision will be cast throughout the church and community beginning on or before **May 15, 2020**

Upon receiving the vision, the Church Council will begin work on a ministry assessment of all current ministries on or before **May 26, 2020.** The purpose of the assessment will be to ensure that the ministries are in alignment with the mission and vision of the church, with properly defined structure, accountability, and appropriate administrative oversight. The SPRC will do the same with all staff assignments. This process will be completed by **September 1, 2020.** If an individual ministry fails in this alignment, the responsible leaders have one year to realign it or sunset the ministry. In order to maintain optimal, long-term alignment, we recommend an annual ministry assessment.

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PRESCRIPTION #2 – COMPREHENSIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The goal of comprehensive leadership development work is to pursue a more cohesive, collaborative and effective leadership team which empowers the laity to live into the vision of the church.

- The VCI Team and Pastor, in consultation with the coach, will develop a Leadership Development Team (LDT) of 5-7 persons to foster relational and spiritual bonds among church leadership (lay leaders, pastor and staff). The team will be selected by **November 15, 2019.**
- The LDT will include at least two members of the SPRC. The LDT will guide the church leadership in reading and working through *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni.
- The LDT will structure work with the church leadership to clarify and define all roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes.
- Using *The Volunteer Church: Mobilizing Your Congregation for Growth and Effectiveness* by Leith Anderson & Jill Fox, the LDT will work with the church leadership to strengthen member involvement in ministry for the growth of the church and the advancement of the Kingdom.
- The plan will be completed on or before **August 31, 2020.**

PRESCRIPTION #3 – BRIDGING INTO THE COMMUNITY

A church's mission field is the place where God invites us to live fully into the grace we've been given. When we build bridges into our mission field, we are fully focused on the Jesus Present in the church and in the world. In consultation with the Coach, the VCI Team and the Pastor will appoint a 5-7 person Community Connection Team on or before **April 1, 2020**, to lead and facilitate the building of bridges to the diverse Lufkin community. Prior to its first meeting, the Community Connection Team will read *Get Their Name: How to Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships* by Bob Farr & Doug Anderson. This team will have its first meeting on or before **May 1, 2020** to discuss ideas from the book and begin to lay out the following activities of the church for **2020-2021**:

- The team will develop a connection strategy for connecting persons and groups who utilize the church facilities into the life of the congregation. A part of this work will consider additional connections that can be made with the diverse population of the middle school and their families.
- The team will research and act upon the needs of the people in the local community and gaps in services by conducting a community study.
- The team will conduct at least two bridging events in **2020-2021** (at no charge) to reach new people, build relationships, and invite them to worship. The intention is for the entire

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church to be involved (in some form or fashion) in these events and be an intentional point of entry into the life of the congregation. The team will plan, facilitate and evaluate these events and then will continue and/or adjust them for the coming years based on their fruitfulness. The team will also develop a process for guest follow-up immediately after these special events.

- The Worship Leadership and Pastor will research best practices of culturally diverse worship with an eye for what can be implemented at FUMC Lufkin to make the services more welcoming and accessible to all.

PRESCRIPTION #4 – TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS

The VCI Team and Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will appoint a *Matthew 18 Team* of 5-7 people on or before **October 30, 2019**. Among issues to be addressed are conflict transformation -- how to understand and learn to dance with the issues and personalities where conflict happens so that conflict becomes a part of the transformative work of God, rather than a stumbling block to ministry.

- The team is to read “*Crucial Conversations*” by Patterson, et al., as well as “*Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*” by John Paul Lederach. From this reading, they will establish processes for developing trust and new ways to communicate (based on Matthew 18) that can be brought to the congregation.
- During the season of Advent or Lent the church will observe a time of fasting from complaining, gossiping and other faith debilitating conversations in the church, the home and the community. The team will work with the lay leaders and staff to develop a process for the implementation of this church wide emphasis.
- The team will develop a grievance process which will be presented to the church council for adoption on or before **March 15, 2020**.

PRESCRIPTION #5 – CULTIVATING A CONSISTENT CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY

For Christians, hospitality is the bedrock of human relationships. As scripture tells us, when we receive and embrace the stranger, we may be entertaining messengers of God (Hebrews 13:2).

The VCI Team and Pastor, in consultation with the coach will create a Hospitality Team consisting of 5-7 people by **October 30, 2019**. The team will review the Faith Perceptions Mystery Guest Report and develop a plan based on its information. The plan should include:

- Develop a hospitality audit of the facilities.
- Develop a comprehensive welcoming system to connect new people.
- Recruit and train hospitality team members.
- Create welcome packets or other materials for first-time guests including youth and children.
- Connect hospitality with discipleship.
- Strengthen the system to collect contact information from guests and provide prompt guest follow-up by laity and clergy.

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- Improve other hospitality structures—including, but not limited to: signage, parking, online sermons, building entrances, children’s areas and welcome centers.

As a resource the team will read *Clip-In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church* by Jim Ozier and Fiona Hayworth and recommends *Fusion Turning First Time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* by Nelson Searcy. The hospitality plan will be completed by **April 12, 2020**.

CONCLUSION

We, the consultation team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation in this manner. Our prayers and hope for your congregation is that God will use this process to help you implement your mission more effectively, utilize your compelling vision through a developed plan, and thereby make an eternal difference in the FUMC Lufkin for the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Kate Walker, Lead Consultant
Rev. Steve Wende, Directive Coach
Ms. Marylyn Green, Scribe
Rev. Hazel Jackson, Extra Team Member
Rev. Jim Flagg, Extra Team Member
Rev. Roy James, Extra Team Member

Town Hall Meeting Dates:

***Sunday, August 18, 2019
4:00 pm Fellowship Hall***

***Tuesday, August 20, 2019
Following Church Council Meeting
6:00 pm Fellowship Hall***

***Wednesday, August 21, 2019
10:00 am Pinecrest MRC***

***Thursday, August 22, 2019
10:00 am Fellowship Hall***

Church Conference Date:

***Monday, September 9, 2019
6:00 pm Henderson Chapel***