

Muskegon Lake Harbor United Methodist Church
CONSULTATION REPORT
February 2, 2014

INTRODUCTION

We, the Vital Church Initiative (VCI) consultation team, thank Pastor Mark Erbes, staff, lay leaders and the congregation of Muskegon Lake Harbor United Methodist Church for the invitation to consult with this Body of Christ. The following observations and prescriptions are the result of this consultation team's study of the following information: a) Lake Harbor's self-study document provided by its leaders, b) a MissionInsite demographic report of the area population, c) the January 15, 2014, Mystery Guest Report by Faith Perceptions (the result of worship visits from twelve persons from the community), d) interviews with the pastor, staff and ministry team leaders, e) a focus group with members of the congregation, f) a leaders focus group, and g) input from the consultation workshop. Our prayer is that God will use this assessment experience and consultation report to help Lake Harbor United Methodist Church more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and the world.

STRENGTHS

1. Pastoral Skills

We heard repeatedly that Pastor Mark is well-loved by this congregation. He provides excellent pastoral care and is available to members and non-members alike. He enjoys being in the journey with others, from crises through celebrations. Mark allows leaders to lead and is willing to step in when necessary. He works well with others and demonstrates appreciation for the gifts they bring. His teaching skills are much appreciated.

2. Leaders

Your paid staff and church leaders are a great asset to this congregation. They are skilled, passionate, and committed. They take initiative and have a "whatever it takes" attitude. Your leaders also indicate a willingness for self-examination and change.

3. Worship Planning and Schedule

The ability of the church to offer two worship services is one avenue to reaching a wide variety of new people. This is in direct support of the desire we heard for the church to reach a diverse population. Although the result may sometimes feel difficult, we commend your decision to take a leap of faith and to offer two worship services. Your worship planning teams work diligently to prepare meaningful experiences in worship.

4. VCI Team

Your VCI Team eagerly participated in Phase I of this process. Their responsiveness to and application of Phase I resulted in developing the Shoes 4 Shores ministry and placing an electronic sign on the front lawn. The team continues to lead the church in reaching out to the local community.

5. Church Family

We heard from many people that the members of Lake Harbor UMC are a close-knit group of people who are very loving and caring toward one another. The congregation values the sense of family and genuinely enjoys seeing each other and being together. We heard from some in the congregation who experienced great support and love through very difficult times in their lives. Your Mystery Guests also observed that you enjoy being together. One of the twelve said, "...we could hear many conversations where the congregation had obviously known each other for some time and enjoyed each other's company."

CONCERNS

1. Lack of Staff and Leadership Development

The staff and leaders are dedicated and faithful; however, there appears to be an absence of concrete, measurable goals based on mission and ministry strategy. We saw little evidence of regular evaluation and review. A lack of evaluation or feedback leaves staff and leaders to draw their own conclusions about their effectiveness. Effective and timely communication among staff and leaders is lacking. While lay personnel and child protection policies are in place, they apparently are not being fully implemented.

Chairpersons are put in place without adequate training or mentoring. In addition, some appear to be serving in areas outside their giftedness and passion. There is little coordination in planning and implementation among ministry areas. Ministry teams/committees often seem to be acting independently with no sense of an overall purpose or unity.

2. Lack of Extravagant Generosity

You have shown generosity in sharing your resources by opening your doors to host community groups and ministries. We recognize that there is a core of generous givers at Lake Harbor UMC. The 20 top givers of 177 giving units in the congregation provide 50.6% of the annual income. This uneven giving across the congregation exposes you to financial vulnerability. Extravagant generosity is one of the marks of a fruitful congregation.

3. Absence of Intentional Faith Development

We affirm your classes, studies, mission opportunities, and teaching in worship. All of these provide some avenues of faith development. There is presently no clear road map for intentional spiritual development or faith maturation; this means connecting the head to the heart, feet, and hands. Without understanding and purposefully living your own spiritual journey, articulating your faith to others is missed.

4. Lack of Radical Hospitality

The Mystery Guest report indicated that the greeting before worship (pre-service greeting) was mostly warm and welcoming. Other Mystery Guests observed small groups of people excitedly talking to each other and “not to me.” The greeting after worship (post-service greeting) was inconsistent. Some were invited to the fellowship area or to a class, while others felt “invisible” or “alone.”

Examples of an unwelcoming atmosphere include:

1. Photographs, memorabilia, clippings, untidy postings throughout the building
2. Outdated (2012) quote on the website homepage
3. Inconsistent use of the Welcome Center
4. Unclear child protection procedures
5. “Dead” and broken toys
6. Partial walls creating inadequate privacy for both music and nursery ministries
7. Insufficient or poorly placed interior and exterior signage
8. Inconsistent quality of décor
9. Cluttered rooms and hallways
10. Uninviting and inadequate space for Celebration Service

These things demonstrate a possible unhealthy tie to the past and reinforce a guest’s perception of not “belonging.” Building a culture of hospitality will help guests feel important and encourage them to return.

5. Lack of Passionate Worship

While many in the congregation enjoy the worship services, your Mystery Guests did not find them very inspiring or uplifting. Regarding the music, one said, “No one seemed bored, but no one seemed engaged either.” Corporate worship is about praising and experiencing God as an expression of a personal relationship

with God through Jesus Christ. Worship is one of the main avenues for guests to connect with your congregation and should be done with excellence and passion.

PRESCRIPTIONS

To address the above concerns, Lake Harbor United Methodist Church will implement the following prescriptions.*

1. Staff and Leadership Development

We affirm the continued use of the United Methodist mission statement, “Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” and the Lake Harbor strategy of ‘welcoming all, empowered by Christ, sent forth to serve.’ The congregation will strengthen its staff, paid and unpaid, in the following ways.

A. Lake Harbor will participate in a service of prayer, healing, and forgiveness, to embrace God’s mandate for making disciples. This will allow the membership to be fully prepared for the Lord’s vision for the future. This will be led by the coach, or her designee, in consultation with the pastor, no later than May 18, 2014.

B. Staff Meetings

1. The pastor shall facilitate monthly staff meetings for all paid staff beginning no later than April 14, 2014, for spiritual development, team building, communication, training, and working toward goal setting and a shared understanding of the congregation’s mission and strategy. An available resource is *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni.
2. The SPRC shall facilitate a bi-annual review of the Lay Personnel and Child Protection policies for all staff, paid and unpaid. This will include lay volunteers who work with children, youth, or adults with special needs. This shall begin no later than May 5, 2014.
3. The pastor will facilitate one of the monthly meetings as a one-day retreat for all paid staff and will be held no later than May 9, 2014. This retreat will be held annually thereafter.
4. The Administrative Council chair and the pastor shall facilitate quarterly meetings for all staff, paid and unpaid, for strategic planning and goal setting to accomplish the mission and strategy of the entire congregation. This will begin no later than June 30, 2014. This quarterly meeting will replace one of the monthly staff meetings in #1 above.

C. SPRC

1. The SPRC shall revise the Child Protection Policy to include bi-annual background checks for all care givers. This will begin no later than May 5, 2014.
2. Each SPRC liaison will meet with their assigned staff person monthly to share the current status of their ministry beginning no later than May 5, 2014.
3. The SPRC will implement annual reviews for each paid staff person completed no later than December 20, 2014.

2. Extravagant Generosity

The tithe, or ten percent, is the biblical standard for giving. Healthy congregations provide every believer the opportunity to experience the gift of giving as an expression of faith. Lake Harbor UMC will begin building a culture of extravagant generosity by implementing an ongoing process of encouraging tithing.

A. The process will begin with understanding and internalizing giving as a spiritual discipline such as prayer, service, and worship. To that end, the Finance Committee, in consultation with the pastor, will implement a congregation-wide study which will be completed no later than August 31, 2014. The purpose of this study is to learn the spiritual principles and joy of tithing. Possible resources can be obtained from David Bell, Executive Director, The United Methodist Foundation.

B. During this study, the pastor will preach a sermon series on financial stewardship.

C. The Finance Committee shall take the lead in providing ongoing monthly “stewardship moments” during worship to keep the congregation focused on this discipline. These stewardship moments will be a 2-3 minute

personal testimony of how giving has strengthened the speaker's personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. These will begin no later than August 31, 2014.

D. The Finance Committee Chair, in consultation with the pastor, shall take the lead in the congregation receiving its annual commitment of gifts to accomplish its mission and ministry strategy by November 30, 2014.

3. Intentional Faith Development

Lake Harbor shall develop and implement a clear pathway for discipleship.

A. Pathway Team

1. The pastor, Administrative Council chair, and Lay Leader, in consultation with the coach, will form a Pathway Team of 3-5 people to create a clear discipleship pathway for moving people from where they are on their spiritual journey to living their faith daily as fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. The team will study the book *Deepening Your Effectiveness* by Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy. This team shall be named no later than April 2, 2014.
2. The pathway to discipleship will be the plan through which new guests and members are invited to begin their spiritual journey as they become disciples of Jesus Christ. The pathway strategy may include small groups for prayer, study, support, spiritual encouragement, and accountability, all designed to deepen their faith and help them grow as disciples. The pathway design shall be completed by November 1, 2014.
3. The pastor will preach a sermon series on the pathway plan no later than January 25, 2015.
4. Leaders of different components of the pathway will be identified, recruited, and trained by February 18, 2015.

B. Lay Leadership Team

1. The team shall implement a congregation-wide spiritual gifts inventory to be completed no later than August 15, 2014. The results shall be collected and used by the Lay Leadership Team in the nominations process.
2. The Lay Leadership Team will match potential leaders with mentors, possibly leading as co-chairs, in their respective areas of ministry by January 25, 2015.

4. Radical Hospitality

Hospitality matters from the time a person drives into the parking lot until he or she gets home. Building a culture of hospitality is of critical importance to the life of the church in helping new and returning people feel like they belong. To build this culture, Lake Harbor UMC will implement the following:

A. Facilities Upgrade

1. A Facilities Upgrade Team of 8-10 will be chosen by the pastor, Lay Leader, and Administrative Council chair, in consultation with the coach, by May 3, 2014. This team shall include the Trustee chair or designee. The team will examine the overall signage (parking, exterior, and interior) for its effectiveness from the perspective of a first-time guest.
2. This team shall design and implement a plan to adequately address the signage needs by August 1, 2014.
3. This team will also explore ways and develop a plan to update and fully enclose the nursery so that it is separate from the music area by August 1, 2014.
4. The plan will be implemented by November 30, 2014.

B. First Impressions

1. A First Impressions Team of 6-8 people will be created by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, by June 1, 2014. This team will focus on the relational aspects of creating a culture of radical hospitality in the congregation. Radical hospitality is a spiritual discipline. A possible resource is *First Impressions* by Mark Waltz.

2. Greeter training will be provided by the team to ensure a consistent experience before, during, and after worship. This training will take place by August 31, 2014.
3. This team will recruit, train, and deploy Welcome Center hosts for Sunday services by September 14, 2014.
4. Updates to the website are vital, including the removal of outdated materials. The website shall include a section designed for first-time guests. This section shall include information about the church, service times and directions to the church by March 30, 2014.
5. In order to be more forward-looking, the team will de-clutter the entire building by November 30, 2014. Special attention will be paid to bulleted items above, 4.1, 4.5, 4.8, and 4.9.
6. To ensure the safest, healthiest nursery environment possible and to help guests feel comfortable leaving their child(ren), the team shall provide for full compliance with page 27 of the Child Protection Policy, VIII. Guidelines for Nursery.
 - a. Page 27 will be posted outside the childcare rooms in clear view for the parents to see by March 30, 2014.
 - b. Parents of every child in the nursery must sign page 27 to be kept on file beginning no later than March 30, 2014.
7. The Lay Leader will develop and implement a plan to train the congregation in radical hospitality by June 15, 2014. This plan may include and is not limited to regular “hospitality moments” during worship, training of leadership groups, small groups, and monthly web and newsletter features.

C. Celebration Service

1. The pastor, in consultation with the Worship Planning Team designee, and the coach, will create a Celebration Service Assessment Team of 2-3 people by March 25, 2014.
2. This team will review the January 15, 2014, Mystery Guest Report and implement ways to make the Celebration Service more inviting and comfortable by April 6, 2014. It is our understanding that the space is more than 80% full and therefore limiting growth. We recommend finding another space for the Celebration Service.

5. Passionate Worship

To improve the quality of worship and create contact points with God, Lake Harbor UMC will implement the following:

A. Worship Evaluation

1. A Worship Evaluation Team of 3-5 people will be appointed by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, no later than March 24, 2014.
2. This team will review the January 15, 2014, Mystery Guest Report from Faith Perceptions and note areas of concern related to all aspects of worship by April 6, 2014.
3. The team will also visit at least three other churches who have effective worship for those under the age of 50 by May 11, 2014.
4. The coach or her designee will conduct a worship workshop focusing on worship experiences that connect people with God and with each other. This workshop will be attended by the Worship Committee, Worship Planning Teams, and any other persons who lead in worship by May 26, 2014.
5. The Worship Planning Teams will develop worship services based on this training with the goal of providing experiential and participatory worship experiences that are inspiring and uplifting and connect diverse groups of people with God. This will begin no later than two months after the worship workshop. Possible resources include *Starting a Second Worship Service* by Charles Arn and numerous online options like BlueFishTV.

B. To further enhance the inspiring nature of worship, the pastor will participate in continuing education to hone his message delivery skills to be more relevant to diverse generations. This continuing education shall also

address heartfelt ways of applying the message to a Spirit-driven life. This continuing education shall occur no later than June 20, 2014.

CONCLUSION

We, the consulting team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation through this Vital Church Initiative assessment process. Our prayers and hope for your congregation are that God will use this process to help your church become more effective and fruitful. May God give you courage and strength as you move forward.

Naomi Garcia, Lead Consultant
Mara Marsman, Scribe
Bruce Kintigh
Pamela Stewart
Colleen Treman

Town Hall Meeting Dates:

Thursday, February 13, 2014, 7:00 PM
Tuesday, February 25, 2014, 7:00 PM
Sunday, March 2, 2014, 3:00 PM

Church Conference Date:

Sunday, March 16, 2014, 10:15 AM

**Note: Prescription deadlines may be adjusted in consultation with the assigned VCI coach.*