

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

For

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Submitted by

THE CENTER FOR URBAN CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL

March, 2015

- A. Proposed new Vision Statement from Visioning Summit, February 28, 2015:

Growing in love and service through relationships with God & community.

- B. Assets for today's and tomorrow's fruitful witness:

Trinity United Methodist Church (TUMC) is an historic congregation located near the demographic center of Lafayette, Indiana. The oldest Christian fellowship in Tippecanoe County, TUMC is blessed with several distinctive ministry **assets** as you prepare to enter a third century of faithful ministry. These assets are:

1. **TUMC today has a very creatively blended form of compelling worship in its beautifully sustained early twentieth century sanctuary.** Twenty members interviews in this consultation ranked “the way we emphasize worship” as the chief strength of TUMC today. The CUCR visits as many as thirty congregation’s worship services each year. We find TUMC’s current form of what might be called *Traditional-blended worship* on the Sunday we visited to be in the top 5% among our experiences! Friendly greetings to both friends and visitors, lively and diverse styles of music, traditional Wesleyan liturgy, and engaging and energetic preaching are worship components we strongly affirm within the worship we experienced in TUMC. Your current worship form is a great asset for your congregation today and for at least the next ten years!

2. **TUMC today appears to be comprised of a deeply committed active congregation of approximately 100 persons.** Within this body, the majority (approximately 75%) are *retired long time members, deeply interested in lending their support for TUMC's more clearly defined future witness.* This group is the spiritual, missional, and financial backbone of TUMC today. They are to be treasured as *seasoned Disciples!*

The second largest demographic group within the *Trinity 100* today is very visible young to mid-aged adults (ages 35-50). Most are couples in which one or both are life-long United Methodists. Many if not all of the youth and children in TUMC today are parts of these families. This group appears to this observer to comprise approximately 20% of the active membership. **This group at TUMC is a very significant group, in terms both of size and already demonstrated commitment.** In my interviews, which included the majority of this group, these are already exercising leadership in obvious ways in the missional, worship, and administrative life of TUMC. Growing this demographic group's presence and level of participation as younger disciples in formation is essential to TUMC's faithful future. **The reality that these are faithfully present today, with their hands already on the *ministry plow*, is a tremendous asset to TUMC's present and future.**

3. **TUMC today holds high priority on its *missional witness within its immediate social setting, the core city (1 mile radius from its campus) including both Lafayette and W. Lafayette (Purdue campus).*** This commitment to mission is *not* a new ministry idea in TUMC. For as long as most interviewees can remember, TUMC has carried out various forms of direct service to individuals and families in need within its core city context for ministry. While this aspect of TUMC's priorities is not unusual for urban congregations in North America today, the *high priority placed on missional witness*, as expressed by 90% of the active members I interviewed, is a precious asset for TUMC's future.

An *ecumenical approach* to mission is well established in TUMC. Lafayette Urban Ministries (LUM) and collaboration with several of the neighboring missionally-oriented congregations are already strong parts of TUMC's approach to urban mission. Of these *colleague urban faith communities*, LUM and The Catholic Diocese appear to be particularly eager to strengthen their cooperation with TUMC. Whether it is large festivals in the church for

at-risk urban children or the several hands-on ministries with homeless persons and families, TUMC knows itself as a missionally committed congregation, and the congregation is proud of this priority in both its history and present moment. This *missional consciousness* is also a great and largely untapped asset for TUMC's future Disciple-making future (See C.1 on p.4)

4. TUMC's physical campus, including both of its buildings, is *both* a ministry asset to its future witness *and* a challenge to maintain. In 80% of our interviews with members, this *both/and* view of the church's real estate was articulated. Members of the Board of Trustees who I interviewed are particularly aware of the significant capital expenditures both of your buildings could use *now*.

The sanctuary building is affirmed as a Disciple-Making asset by 80% of the members I interviewed. In its present configuration, the sanctuary itself provides a tremendous space for worship for TUMC's foreseeable future. Other parts of this building are presently configured for Christian faith formation and fellowship space for all ages of a TUMC of the future with twice as many regular participants as is the case today.

The education building's utility for TUMC's future is far less clear to the members with whom I spoke. The *ministry use* of the education building is one of the greatest opportunities for TUMC's future Disciple-making and direct service witness within its urban context. But creative new approaches will be required in the future if this opportunity is to be realized.

C. Identifying and engaging directly TUMC's perceived challenges today will unmask disguised opportunities to be yourselves transformed *and* offer Christ's transformation to your community. Some of those thinly disguised opportunities masquerading as challenges today are:

1. While TUMC is, to this visitor, a very caring and friendly congregation to all who *come* to visit, we did not observe or hear described any strongly held value or strategy in place for "*going*" to strengthen your congregation's ties with your neighbors, though your just-beginning young adult group shows some promise in this regard.

Your church campus, according to your city planning staff, is located in one of the most densely populated and diverse residential areas in Lafayette-W. Lafayette. Easy to identify examples of these neighbors within a mile of your campus are new *urban pioneer condo purchasers*, senior adults who live in affordable apartments, Purdue graduate students in affordable lofts off Main Street, UM-background Purdue undergraduates with *a missional itch*, urban elementary, middle school, and high school youth in the several public and parochial schools within walking distance of TUMC, and residents at LUM's transitional living community.

Each of these people groups may respond to an intentional invitation to walk more closely with the Christ who becomes increasingly visible to them in the right small group experience within TUMC's growing number of small groups. Initiated out of TUMC's risk-taking missional outreach, these new groups show your neighbors *Christ's unconditional hospitality* as a core value within an emerging diverse new TUMC of the next years. One day soon, as each group's practice of *radical hospitality* invites and includes these new folks, the members of the small group will begin to find their way into either your current worship service or *some yet to be formed new service they help design at TUMC. In God's time, the new person(s) will come to the altar (or however you receive new members) surrounded by the other members of their group who have shown them TUMC's kind of Jesus and mentored them to this decision!*

2. Apart from the almost unanimously embraced primacy of Sunday morning worship today, I cannot detect any other commonly held Spiritual practices within TUMC's fellowship. **Today's TUMC active congregation will greatly benefit from a season spent in prayerfully developing and putting into practice a clearly articulated set of core spiritual practices as a new definition of what it means to be a TUMC Christian in formation.**

Identification of these core spiritual practices is one of the most sublime gifts of our tradition as Wesleyans.

Examples of these very practical Spiritual practices are:

- *Daily prayer for others you know, the world, and yourself
- *Weekly attendance in worship unless otherwise prevented
- *Tithing or growing toward tithing your first fruits to the Lord
- *Being attentive to the Holy Spirit's promptings to invite someone you know to your small group of Christians in formation
- *Spending at least one hour each week serving someone else's expressed needs

TUMC's active members of all ages and stages can radically alter your present trajectory as a church most dramatically by each member participating in a weekly groups, e.g. 21st Century Class Meetings, based on your commonly embraced TUMC Spiritual practices. Once articulated and embraced by TUMC's Church Council, these *Spiritual practices* become the transformative basis of all who join new small groups formed in the years ahead.

3. **Your congregation is aging.....what a gift!!** In my forty years of ministry much has changed in congregational life. Yet one thing remains the same: *God is still making old people who love, support, and depend on God's church!* These are gifted mentors for younger Disciples in TUMC. Assure these elders that their form of worship with their favorite hymns and readings will not perish in the transforming TUMC. As long as elders feel their voices are sought out, heard and respected, they will be among the strongest supporters of the new forms of witness at TUMC!
4. **Most of TUMC's younger leaders live out in the newer parts of town. How can they persuade their friends to come all the way down town to TUMC?** Recommendation: take TUMC to those neighborhoods by encouraging the formation of ongoing weekly homogeneous small groups in the living rooms and back yards of your active younger members. Based on TUMC's common *Spiritual practices*, utilize your younger members' already existing friendship networks to form new groups. The topic of each group is that group's to determine, e.g. parenting in the age of instant connectivity, how to care for aging parents, etc. As long as some version of each of *TUMC's common Spiritual practices* is touched on, as the Spirit leads, in each group session, good and Godly things will happen up ahead. In the process, TUMC's age demographic will become younger! (Clue: What do you think it means to TUMC to practice *The Church Has Left the Building?!?*)
5. **Overcoming the M-Word.....**shortage of money is among the most often heard challenges in my conversations with TUMC members. You are far from unique in voicing this challenge.

Consider using these *Spiritual practices* in TUMC's financial discussions now and for the next five years:

- a. Read aloud and discuss briefly Psalm 23 at the beginning of each Finance, Trustees, SPRC, Church Council, and Church Conference meeting. (After a while, ask your pastor to give you another text to reflect on for a while regarding God's promises.)

- b. In your discernment of TUMC's common *Spiritual practices*, build in the commitment to tithe your first fruits each year.
- c. Explore with great earnestness all legal and ethical ways to spend both the income and principle of TUMC's endowment *ASAP*.
- d. Consider encouraging the creation of an ecumenical collaboration/organization of missionally minded downtown and suburban congregations, judicatories, and youth organizations to serve even more intentionally the at-risk youth and children of your one-mile radius urban core. This new missional arm of TUMC holds potential for contributing to expenses of the building's use, including repair and maintenance.

If TUMC's leadership practices these Spiritual practices for two or three years, and invites the entire active membership to stay abreast with frequent church financial updates in each Sunday's worship bulletin and each month's newsletter, see what happens to the *M-Word* over time!

You stand at a critical moment in TUMC's long and distinguished life and witness. If the CUCR can be helpful in any way as you examine and consider implementation of these proposals, please let me know through your pastor. May God's Hand guide you to a new faithful and fruitful chapter of ministry!

Respectfully submitted,

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