

## **March 28, 2017 - Church Council Visioning Session - at the Parsonage**

We opened with a devotion by Kathy Bradley (Council Chair) based on 1 Corinthians 3.

Heather Rodrigues (pastor) explained how our discussion about visioning began with the conversation at our January retreat about whether to have a new strategic plan. After the retreat, she got in touch with Steve Wende, a pastor from Houston in training to be a pastoral and coach in training. He met with a number of church members, including some Council members, on March 6 at the parsonage and offered a snapshot of the urban church today, and hope. We talked that night about the visioning process at DMUMC, and discussed getting current area demographics, which we now have (from a subsequent District meeting that Heather and Kathy attended). We also talked about creating a community of strong leaders at DMUMC, and it is clear we have that. Steve told us to focus on what we do well, because “you get more of whatever it is you focus on.” We will also need to look at what is not working, but as we look to future, we should focus on our strengths. Heather then shared a couple of the “takeaways” from people who attended that meeting.

Heather explained that we will use the “Appreciative Inquiry” (AI) process for visioning, and Justin Sprague (Council Vice-Chair) then described AI.

Justin noted that Council leaders have been talking about the process for visioning since the retreat and have engaged in much reflection. Heather’s coach Peg had suggested AI, and Justin noted that it is a way of continuing the discussion begun on March 6 in which we focus on strengths and build a strategic plan from that. Justin walked us through the 4 steps of AI: Appreciate what is, imagine what might be, determine what should be, create what will be. Para Drake noted that that AI is more about covenant building, and is consensus based, rather than focused on problem solving. Heather pointed out that it fits with Methodism’s belief in prevenient and sustaining grace. Annette Martin said that if we focus on what is good, then what is not good will diminish. Justin said that this approach lets us embrace our passions.

We then looked at the flow of AI, using the circle chart. The first stage is the discovery phase, where we understand what we are good at and what gives us life, and learn from that. That takes time. We came up with a list of strengths at the March 6 meeting, but this is an iterative process. The second step is to dream about what could be. This is the building step, where we see what we are doing well and decide, based on that, what the next step should be. It is an envisioning step in which we consider who we are and where we want to be in 3-5 years. The third stage is the design phase, when we come up with specific action plans for accomplishing our vision. This is the point at which Council and individual ministry teams and committees get involved by letting each group explore “how do we get there?” and then work as a larger group to design the plan. The fourth stage is the delivery phase, when we put plans into action. We stressed that this is a circle, so we should be periodically assessing how we are doing and then moving forward. Steve stressed on March 6 that we should not be afraid to make mistakes and be willing to learn from them.

Karalyn Colopy asked whether the purpose is to eventually create a strategic plan, and Justin confirmed that is the goal, though the language we are using is different.

Katie Byers-Dent said this is almost a form of liturgy. Each church has a liturgy, whether written or not. Going through this process is a form of doing a liturgy, of deciding who we are at a meta

level. We are going to do these things because they form us in a certain way. The process gives intentionality to what we are doing.

Karalyn noted that when the last strategic plan was done, the process was born out of a need to fix the building, have more money, increase membership, and so forth. She asked whether that is an example of focusing on problems instead of strengths. Justin suggested that this relates to the dreaming stage where we might ask, "Do we envision us as bigger than we are now? How do we do that?" This may not be solving a growth problem per se, but it will mean that if we see ourselves doing certain things, we might then ask what that will mean in terms of growth. Karalyn noted that this is a more positive approach. Justin said that problem solving would look at "what is the problem keeping people from being involved?" AI would look at what are we doing that gets people involved.

Heather related the parable Steve had told us about the older church that wanted to attract youth to help the church grow, and a new member who joined because of the church's link to the older community. Para pointed out that we talk about growth as something we want, but it is scary, because it changes things and alters the status quo. We have limitations in our mindset that can cause us to sabotage things unconsciously. Barbara DeBerry said she had been on the committee that created the old strategic plan, and that the church was in a very scary place then, with a declining congregation. We made changes then that now allow us the privilege to dream. Roger Owens (our former pastor who oversaw the strategic plan) would be glad to see this.

Heather said that we still need to do a little more in the discovery phase. We will next discuss visioning in May, when Peg and Steve will join us. We will receive a 2-question survey before that meeting and will use the responses to build on in May. We plan to leave that meeting with action items.

Heather then asked us to take 2 minutes to think about these questions:  
In your opinion, where is DM most alive right now?  
Where is there the most joy as a church family?

### **Responses:**

**Youth** - Ashley Hairston said that he had never before been in a church with so many youth who could take over a service. The youth are spiritual, active, growing, not being directed so much as leading. Will Shingleton agreed, noting that he had never seen youth so excited to be part of something together. They have a great time being together and being community.

**Music and worship** - Will said that worship is a strength, based on his perspective in the choir. Annette concurred, mentioning the Hallelujah Chorus at Easter.

**Outreach** - Doris Brown pointed out that we are being with and doing for a wide range of groups, such as CAN, JJ Henderson, Mobile Market, Habitat. There are lots of different activities for different people.

**Open Door Class** - Tom Adkinson noted that the class is 50 years old, and growing. It is a great group of people, providing great support to each other. Attendance averages 30-40 people each Sunday.

**Small Groups generally** - Will mentioned these, and others concurred. Annette mentioned Helping Hands, where folks are working together to do something good, commune with each other, and worship together. Doris noted that small groups let you move around to get to know different people. Karalyn emphasized that the small groups are led by laity, so members get to experience praying, leading - spiritual leadership - in a safe setting. Ashley said these groups are doorways that can lead you in very different directions. Para mentioned the sense of joy in the Wednesday Morning Women's Group. Gair McCullough (youth minister) compared this to a big school versus a small school, where even in a big school you can find your small group. The same thing applies to church. She is in the handbell choir, which gives her a chance to try something new, even if she is not good at it, and she knows folks still love her. Will noted that small groups do a good job of taking church outside of the building.

**Willingness to say yes** - Katie noted that we say yes more than we say no. People are willing to try something new, even if they have reservations. They say "I am still here even if I don't get my way." 1 Corinthians 3 teaches "you will get your part to build" on God's temple. The church changes, but there is a sure foundation. Tom mentioned that Urban Ministries, with which he has been involved since the early 1970s, currently needs volunteers.

**Bible study** - Barbara says she has found the greatest joy in true Bible study, where she can dig deeper in the Word. She mentioned her transformative experience with Disciple. Doris noted the value of doing a common activity like a book study. Heather suggested that we might come up with a common study for the entire church in the fall to help us build a common image of ourselves as a congregation and give us a common tagline about who we are. Barbara asked about something like a small-scale Stephen Minister training, to help more folks develop listening and caregiving skills.

**Relationship building** - Kathy noted that one of our strengths is our ability to work in and through conflict together. It helps build confidence, build relationship, and build trust in our ability to face our differences.

**Children's ministries** - Para mentioned the strength of our children's ministry, particularly the high quality of the pew projects, children's time in worship, and children's music.

Heather closed the meeting by stressing that in May, we will work to let action drive the plan, instead of having the plan drive action.