

# Assessment of Hillcrest United Methodist Church

## Introduction;

*Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.* Nehemiah 2:17-18

The Israelites had returned from exile to Jerusalem. They had re-formed their nation and community of faith, rebuilt the altar and the temple, re-initiated their celebrations and sacrifices, and renewed their relationship with God. They were in pretty good shape but God's vision had not been completely realized. Distracted by life's toils and troubles and intimidated by opposition and persecution, they didn't do all that God had called them to do. Through Nehemiah, God graciously and powerfully inspired His people to finish fulfilling the plans and promises He had for his chosen people. With God's help and protection they all worked together to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Having completed the repairs to God's holy city, Israel could now truly be a light unto the nations.

*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.* Nehemiah 6:15-16

We have an awesome group of generous, loving, talented, spirit-filled Christians whom God has brought together for a reason. Hillcrest has been a good church but I believe God is calling us to work together to become an even greater blessing to this community. I believe God is calling Hillcrest to rediscover its purpose in this community and for its people to rediscover their role in fulfilling that purpose. He wants us to harvest the many souls who are pouring into the area, souls looking for hope, help, and home. God wants Hillcrest to be that community of saints that glorifies Him and intentionally attracts and leads others to Christ in a dynamic life changing way. God is always doing a new thing and I believe He has prepared us for many years for just this moment. So, where Hillcrest has been is good, but where God wants us to be is better.

I have been led by God to develop this assessment of Hillcrest church. I hope it will be helpful in leading us to be the church God is now calling us to be. It will be hard work and it won't happen overnight. It will be worth it if we can just work hard, stay the course, and trust the Lord. Like Nehemiah let us pray, listen to God, and then act.

## **Purpose;**

God wants unbelievers to come to Christ. Jesus commissioned us to make disciples. If Hillcrest is both spiritually healthy **and** fulfilling God's purpose for our church then we should see steady, healthy growth as a minimum.

God wants his people to understand their ministry and mission in life. When we are doing what God calls us to do, as a church and as individuals, we are energized, fruitful, and experience true joy and peace.

Hillcrest has needed to formally assess its purpose, missions, activities and facilities. We have needed to clearly define what those should look like in light of God's calling for our church based on the strengths and gifts He has given us. This assessment has incorporated the thoughts and vision God has given Pastor John the church leadership and myself. This assessment has compared Hillcrest with several vital, spirit-filled churches and identifies best practices that will improve the effectiveness of our church for Christ.

Once God's purposes and priorities for our church have been identified and key missions, activities and facility changes identified to accomplish those purposes, then a formal plan should be written. This plan should be communicated to the congregation and then the plan should be put into action. A clear purpose builds morale, reduces frustration, allows concentration, attracts cooperation, and assists evaluation.

Frequent reviews should be made to gage the success and effectiveness of our plan with appropriate steering corrections to keep us on track. We must have balance in our missions and activities with a focus on the key areas in which God has called us to minister to our community and congregation. An important key will be the training and equipping of our congregation to use the gifts God has given them to win souls for Christ.

Everything we do must be done with love and compassion and for the glory of God. We must let the Holy Spirit guide us so that we will be of one mind, united in purpose to be the church God has called us to be. We must pray and then be ready to act. We should consult the bible during this process. We should look at Christ's ministry on earth. What did He do and how did He do it? What did He tell us to do? We should look at the images of the church in the bible. How is the church described? What did they do and how did they do it? What was their focus?

## References;

The Bible- God

12 Keys to an Effective Church- Ken Callahan, Lover's Lane UMC

The Purpose Driven Church- Rick Warren, Saddleback Community Church

Opening the Front Door-Closing the Back-R. Frank Gillis, Jr., UMC VA. Conference

The Methodist Book of Discipline-1996 edition

Thinking Beyond the Box- CCN video

Information obtained from the following churches;

Wilderness Community Church

New Life in Christ Church

Ebenezer United Methodist Church

## Criteria for the Assessment;

The Great Commandment; Love God and love others. (Matthew 22:37-40)

The Great Commission; Go and make disciples. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Early Church; The hands and feet of Christ (Acts 2:42-47)

The five purposes of the purpose driven church- Rick Warren (Acts 2:42-47)

1. **Outreach**- Our task is to evangelize.
2. **Worship**-Our task is to exalt.
3. **Fellowship**-Our task is to encourage.
4. **Discipleship**-Our task is to edify.
5. **Service**-Our task is to Equip.

Ten ways to be purpose driven;

1. **Assimilate new members on purpose**- We must be prepared to disciple them and provide them with the fellowship they are seeking.
2. **Program around your purposes**- We need a program to fulfill each of our purposes.
3. **Educate your people on purpose**- The goal of our education programs should be to help us develop a lifestyle of evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.
4. **Start small groups on purpose**- We need to ensure we have a variety of small groups that meet the varied needs of the entire congregation.
5. **Add staff on purpose**- Look for people who are not just competent but passionate about being involved in one of the purposes of the church.
6. **Organize around purpose based teams**- Organize your leadership around the five purposes.
7. **Budget on purpose**- Your priorities will be reflected in your budget.

8. **Preach on Purpose**-The preaching schedule should include a series on the five fold purposes of the church and life issues facing Christians.
9. **Schedule on purpose**- Designate a month or two each year to focus on one of your five purpose areas.
- 10.**Evaluate on purpose**- Find a practical way and a periodicity for reviewing your progress and success in each of the purpose areas.

The twelve characteristics of a mission focused church-Ken Callahan

**Relational characteristics;**

1. **Specific, concrete mission objectives.** Several key mission activities should be identified that fulfill God's calling for our church.
2. **Strong Pastoral and lay visitation.** Effective churches engage in routine weekly visitation to the unchurched, newcomers and members.
3. **Dynamic worship service.** Most people become a part of the church based on their worship experience.
4. **Significant relational groups.** People come looking for community not committees.
5. **Strong leadership training.** Effective churches nurture their leaders to be relational and caring with individuals in the church and community.
6. **Streamlined organizational structure.** Planning is based on strengths, hopes, and objectives. Its focus is always on God's plan for the church.

**Functional characteristics;**

7. **Several competent programs and activities.** Effective congregations tend to have just a few vital services that serves a wide variety of people. These programs offer hope and help.
8. **Open accessibility.** The pastor and other church leaders must be available to the congregation and community.
9. **High visibility.** Both public and community visibility are important. Are the church doors open to the community?
- 10.**Adequate parking, land and landscaping.** Parking can inhibit attendance. Landscaping impacts the perception of your church.
- 11.**Adequate space and facilities.** Construction of a new sanctuary must be carefully considered based on projected growth. Adequate Sunday school facilities must exist where distracting activities don't interfere with lessons. An adequate fellowship area is important to encourage involvement in fellowship activities.
- 12.**Solid financial resources.** God will provide if we are faithful. We just need to educate the congregation on the purpose of giving and the spiritual need it provides.

## Assessment Summary:

- We need to evaluate the ministry needs of the community to determine if there is a special mission activity that God is calling us to fulfill. This activity would impact a significant portion of the local community. This mission activity would involve a large part of the congregation and would be the basis of our reputation in the community and a major means for attracting people to Hillcrest.
- Our caring ministry should be expanded to provide for the long-term care for our congregation. A coordinator should be established who would track all those who have caring needs and coordinate the various church organizations to ensure those needs are met on a continuous basis.
- The worship committee should evolve into a worship team that will work together to advise and support the pastor in enhancing the worship services. The team would determine the teaching and worship needs of the congregation and coordinate the music, scripture, and supplemental activities to support this. The team would evaluate the use of multi-media technology and the creation of a contemporary worship service. The team would evaluate changes to the worship service to meet the needs of our youth and younger families.
- The staff parish relations committee should evaluate the workload and priorities of the pastor to ensure he is able to focus on the worship service preparation and on his special teaching responsibilities such as new member classes. These would be key areas of focus for the pastor in the development of stronger and more active disciples at Hillcrest.
- A process for the assimilation of new members should be developed as soon as possible. It should consist of a progression of Christian education activities that would each culminate in a formal commitment to become more involved in fellowship, education, and service opportunities. Established members should be encouraged to participate in this process as well.
- Hillcrest needs to augment its church staff with someone who can focus on Christian education and youth ministries. We need someone to develop a Christian education program that establishes a core curriculum, provides for the training and equipping of members to serve, inspires Sunday school attendance, expands bible studies, and supports our process for the assimilation of new members. Our youth ministry needs additional coordination due to its recent growth.
- We need to expand our small group fellowship opportunities. Small groups that provide caring **and** accountability are critical to individual spiritual growth and church health. Training for small group leaders and development of some guidelines will need to occur.
- We need to establish a culture of serving. Even new Christians and members can serve in some capacity. We need to establish expectations for service from all members and provide the opportunities.

## **The Assessment;**

### **Outreach**

#### **Why is this important?**

Our task is to evangelize. "and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." We must intentionally reach out to the community and witness to them about the good news. They need to know God loves them and that they are born for a purpose. The church should provide a focus for living. Several key mission activities should be identified that fulfill God's calling for our church. They will naturally utilize our special strengths and spiritual gifts and should satisfy substantial needs within the community served. These activities should involve large segments of the congregation and will become the basis by which we are known in the community and a key to future growth. The congregation must be trained and encouraged to invite others to church.

#### **What do we do now?**

Hillcrest does not have an aggressive evangelism focus in the community at this time. We haven't clearly identified our target in the community so that a proper evangelistic style can be implemented. We have engaged in occasional outreach activities such as a community open house and distribution of flyers advertising special event worship services. We have advertised our Vacation Bible School (VBS) to the community as well as other church events such as yard sales. We have engaged in focused prayer for our community.

We have primarily relied on our accessibility to the community and our visibility in the community to draw persons to Hillcrest. We have Boy Scout and Brownie troops who meet in our church. We have opened our doors to several community organizations that offer persons counseling and support. We have a pre-school that uses our facilities. Our mission program is very solid and supports local, national and world missions. Mission activities are organized and advertised on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. We have several mission activities that impact members of the local community.

We provide books and magazines to nursing homes and members of the congregation go to local nursing homes to sing on a weekly basis. Our support of "Christmas in April" (home repair), Bethany Christian Services (crisis pregnancy), Dove and Angel Tree programs (Christmas gifts and meals), Thanksgiving meals, and Hope House shelter (paper products), also provide visibility for our church.

Hillcrest now has an active web site where persons can find information on our church. We normally do not advertise in the yellow pages. We do not have signs that are strategically located to alert persons to the location of our church. The communication leadership position is not currently filled.

Another aspect of evangelism is our ministry for greeting guests and providing follow-up visits to inspire them to return to our fellowship. Our visitation ministry has been effective in making our visitors feel welcome. Volunteers from the

congregation visit our guests and bring them bread as a way of welcoming them to our fellowship. A letter from the pastor is also used to communicate our desire to see our guests return. Greeters at the entrance to the sanctuary welcome guests to the 11:00 service. Our greeters recognize their importance in establishing the atmosphere of a warm, joyful fellowship. Hillcrest is a very friendly, welcoming church and our tradition of passing the peace during the worship service offers an opportunity to quickly and privately greet guests rather than single them out in front of the congregation which can be embarrassing and intimidating.

The pastor is a major reason people come back to church. The pastor's welcoming personality, the joy and excitement expressed in the worship service and his teaching ability have a tremendous impact on the guests. The pastor is active in several Christian organizations in the community. This also provides visibility to the community.

### **Where is God leading us?**

Evangelism and outreach may cost money. God will provide the resources if we will have faith. Hillcrest needs to evaluate the make up of the community and assess the needs of the community so we will know to whom we are called to minister. Hillcrest should engage the resources of the Ashland District or Virginia Conference to assist in this effort. The Methodist Book of Discipline provides guidance on establishing a task team to assess churches and communities in rapidly growing or changing areas. This task team would need to evaluate the geographic, demographic, cultural, and spiritual aspects of our neighborhood. This information can be used to determine if we have the mission and program activities that are required to provide for the needs of our community. These key mission and program activities will be one the primary means for attracting people to Hillcrest and will be the basis for our reputation in the community. Additionally we will gain insight into the type of worship that will best reach the members of our community.

We should continue to support the community with the mission activities we have initiated. We should bless and dedicate the gifts we send as part of the worship service so the congregation will be knowledgeable of what is being accomplished. We should seek more individual involvement at homeless shelters and soup kitchens.

Alpha is a fellowship-evangelism activity designed to introduce seekers to Christ in a non-threatening way. It revolves around a dinner activity with a speaker. Attendees are given a chance to ask questions about Christianity without any pressure to commit to Christ or join the church. This has proven effective for many churches. Hillcrest should explore this as an activity to offer the community Christ.

One of the most effective means of evangelism is friendship evangelism. If the worship service is consistently dynamic and joyful, if members feel that the persons they invite will sense the power and presence of God and see the love and friendship of the body, they will want to invite others to Hillcrest. Members need to be encouraged by the Pastor and the leadership team to invite their friends,

neighbors and family. The pastor needs to teach on this subject periodically and the Christian education ministry needs to provide evangelism training for members. Members may be hesitant to invite friends and family with children if we don't continue to provide the child care and children's ministries programs that will allow them to focus on the worship service while their children are cared for. Additionally there may be concerns with the church facilities such as parking and landscaping and other cosmetic issues. Hillcrest should take a survey of the church body that will probe this area of evangelism in our church. This survey could be part of a broader church survey that evaluates the worship service and Christian education needs in addition to thoughts about our facilities. The proposed conference appointed task team could incorporate this into its evaluation or include it in their assessment.

Our Vacation Bible School is popular with the community. Hillcrest should aggressively advertise and intentionally invite members of the community to attend VBS to leverage this outreach activity.

The church should consider offering an open house to the community. Although the first attempt did not attract a large number of individuals from the community we must realize that it frequently takes years to develop a ministry or activity. There may have been issues with advertising or the selection of a weekend where other community activities competed for the attention of the community. The event was very successful in pulling together a large segment of the congregation and showing that we could plan and execute an event of this type.

Although flyers may not be the most effective method of advertising there may still be some that are called by God through that medium. The communication ministry must be active and aggressive and be supported by appropriate church funds. Hillcrest should spend money on advertising in the local paper, community magazines, and in the telephone book yellow pages. We should advertise special events on the radio, particularly the stations that are listened to by persons in our community. Hillcrest needs to purchase and install signs in key areas of the community to point the way to our church.

We need to ensure the bread ministry is properly supported such that a small group of people is not burdened with all the visits. According to studies the closer to Sunday that we visit the greater the impact of the visit. Information on the church and its ministries should be distributed with the bread. Bread ministers should be knowledgeable of church ministries and activities. Some evangelism training may be helpful.

Our greeter ministry is important. They will probably provide visitors the first impression they receive of our church body. Greeters should be available for both services for handing out bulletins. Although the 8:15 service is sufficiently intimate enough in size to ensure no visitors are missed it might be a little intimidating to visitors to find their way to the sanctuary without someone specifically assigned to greet them and answer any questions about the service and

child care. This will be especially true as our church grows. The church has made up a nice welcome brochure. The greeters or head usher should ensure visitors are identified and provided with an information packet. The brochure could be supplemented with items such as pencils and magnets that advertise our church in addition to the church newsletter. Greeters should continue to be stationed well ahead of time to ensure early arrivers aren't missed. Greeters should be aware of our child care facilities, and be ready to provide hearing aid devices and large print Hymnals and Bibles to those in need. Hillcrest should consider stationing persons at the church doors for at least the later service to provide additional greeting to our visitors. These greeters could direct visitors to the sanctuary or nursery and help orient first time visitors. It would also benefit all members of the congregation to receive a warm greeting and have the door opened as well. The youth should participate in greeter activities to show the youth friendly posture of our church.

Church leaders need to improve their accessibility to visitors and the congregation by participating in greeting activities both inside and outside the sanctuary prior to and after the service. The pastor should consider making himself available to greet the congregation and visitors before the service and inspire an atmosphere of joy and excitement and fellowship. This would require giving up pre-service choir practice but might be of more benefit to the congregation.

We must ensure we have a nursery for all worship services and Sunday school. We must support our nursery coordinator and ensure the congregation understands the importance of the nursery for allowing the congregation to focus on worship.

## **Worship**

### **Why is this important?**

Our task is to exalt. "they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to prayers and praising God." The gospel is good news! Our worship should bring us into the presence of God and reveal a power for living. The church should provide a force for living. Most people become a part of the church based on their worship experience. The newcomer must sense the warmth and compassion that exists between the members. The worship service must flow well and give everyone a sense of God's power and presence. The music must be inspirational. The preaching must be easily followed and make sense. It must share something with the congregation that is hopeful and helpful in the midst of the pain and suffering of the present world. The worship service must show the relevance of the Bible and help make God's living word come alive for the congregation. If the worship service is dynamic, joyful, and hopeful the congregation will be inspired to become more involved in Christian education and ministry. The people of Hillcrest will want to bring their friends, neighbors, and family to our fellowship.

### **What do we do now?**

Hillcrest offers two worship services on Sunday mornings. The first service begins at eight-fifteen and the second service begins at eleven o'clock. The services last approximately seventy-five minutes. The eight-fifteen service has elements of a contemporary service, beginning with praise and worship music. The second service is a more traditional service but the atmosphere is informal in nature. Communion is celebrated weekly in both services. Occasionally during the year the pastor offers an altar call opportunity. Usually the Pastor positions himself to greet the congregation on the way out of the service. The pastor makes himself available after the service if a special need arises.

The Pastor creates a sense of joy and celebration and humor in our worship services. The focus of the worship service is clearly on God and Jesus Christ and scriptural based. The message is typically based on the scripture lectionary series provided by the Methodist church. The Pastor prepares the order of worship based on guidance in the Methodist hymnal. The music director chooses the music for the service based on the lectionary scripture topics or based on the theme of specially designated Sundays.

The Pastor leads the worship service and reads the old and new testament scripture except for the rare Sundays when the youth or the lay leaders are in charge of the service. The entire church stands and joins together in the reading of the gospel scripture. This is a good practice provided the reading is not too long. There are not enough bibles in the pews for everyone to be able to read comfortably at the 11:00 service when there is a good crowd or a particular pew is full.

Numerous special worship services are offered during the year. There are services offered on Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve, and Christmas day. A New Years Eve watch service has been held as well. During the Easter season an Ash Wednesday, a Maundy Thursday and a Friday Tennebrae service have been offered to the congregation. With the exception of the Christmas Eve service they are not always well attended, however, they have been very meaningful to those who have participated. Special Sundays are celebrated at Hillcrest. Veterans are honored in a Sunday worship service, which is followed by a fellowship luncheon. Palm Sunday and Pentecost Sunday receive special attention as well. This year a Sunday worship service was dedicated to Christian education. The youth ministry has led the worship services twice this year. The lay leadership conducts the worship service on laity Sunday. There have been dramatic presentations at some of the worship events. These dramatic presentations have been well done and have enhanced the worship experience. The Christmas season plays performed in 2002 were well done.

There is a separate choir for each worship service. A member of the congregation who also plays the music for the early service leads the early service choir. A paid music director leads the music at the eleven o'clock service. There are no children or youth choirs at Hillcrest at this time. The Pastor sings in the choir.

The worship committee supports the Pastor by ensuring the church is set up for the worship service and the communion meal is prepared. This group takes care of seasonal decorations. The worship committee also arranges ushers and acolytes.

The services are children friendly and offer children's sermon time prior to the sermon. Volunteer members of the congregation give the children's message. The puppet ministry is also periodically used to deliver the children's message. The Christian education ministry provides activities for children between the ages of three and seven during the remainder of the service. Junior church for ages eight through twelve meets every other Sunday as well.

The pastor has promoted prayer as an essential element of church health and growth. There is currently a half-hour time of corporate prayer between the early service and the Sunday school hour. A dozen or so persons from the congregation typically gather during this time. The early worship service time was changed from eight-thirty to eight-fifteen this year to accommodate this. The Adult Sunday school class meeting times were shortened from one hour to forty-five minutes in duration to support this time of prayer. The previous meeting time was nine-forty five to ten forty-five.

A Hispanic church meets at Hillcrest several days during the week. Hillcrest also supports the Emmaus para-church organization and frequently hosts Emmaus community worship services at the church. We currently do not have an Emmaus activity coordinator.

## **Where is God leading us?**

The worship service is the key to attracting new members to Hillcrest and for inspiring the current members to a greater and deeper commitment to Christ. We need to build on and enhance our current worship service activities. To this end we need to create a worship team that will work with the Pastor to plan the worship services. This team will include the music director. The team will help identify the teaching needs of the congregation and coordinate the music, scripture, and message to create a cohesive service that is dynamic, joyful, hopeful and helpful.

The church leadership needs to help the Pastor focus on the worship service preparation by ensuring the Pastor has as much time as possible to spend on planning the services and preparing the message. We cannot afford to have an off Sunday. This may involve adding staff, assuming the visitation responsibilities, and performing other tasks in which the Pastor is currently engaged. The staff parish relations committee needs to explore the pastor's schedule and activities to assist in making recommendations to allow this to happen.

Critical to the health of the church and its ability to be the church God calls us to be is the increased involvement of all of our members. The Worship team needs to plan worship services that will teach and inspire our congregation to become more involved in the mission and nurture activities in the church. This can be accomplished by using the worship service, particularly the message, to teach on the basics of Christianity and Christian discipleship. The five-fold purposes of the church would be an excellent example of a series of topics to promote a greater commitment to Christ, to his church at Hillcrest, and to God's work in the community. Life issue topics such as marriage and divorce need to be addressed also. These type topics offer a tremendous opportunity to show the relevance of God's word in our lives today. The more examples and testimonies from modern day Christians whose lives were dramatically changed by God that we can share with the congregation the better. The worship team would work with the pastor to plan and coordinate in advance the necessary message topics and worship activities for the year to allow this to happen. The use of the lectionary should not interfere or restrict the freedom of the pastor to focus on the particular needs and the current issues facing the congregation. Dramatic presentations have been effectively used in the past to present the scripture or the sermon. We should continue to utilize this media to enhance our worship services. We should continue to offer the special worship services that currently exist. The leadership team needs to be more aggressive in exhorting the congregation to attend these activities. The discipleship worship teachings will improve our congregation's commitment to worship and involvement in church activities.

Music is a critical element of the worship service and sets the tone of the service. The worship team needs to ensure the music is carefully selected. It is particularly important to start and end the service with familiar, energetic, inspirational songs. More solemn and worshipful songs can be sung during the middle

of the service to prepare for communion, prayer or an altar call. The majority of the songs selected for worship should be familiar to a large percentage of the congregation. We also need to be more aggressive in incorporating newer music to meet the needs of our youth and younger families. New music could be introduced somewhere in the middle of the service and should be taught to the congregation until they are comfortable with how to sing the song. Hillcrest needs to establish choirs for our youth and children. Music is an excellent way to teach children God's truths. It is also a key way we involve our children and youth in the worship service.

Setting the context of the story and providing some comments on its relevance to us now should enhance the scripture readings. We must recognize that many members don't have the bible study and Sunday school background, as do some of our mature Christian members. The continued use of drama in telling the scripture stories would be an effective way to impact the congregation. The dramatic presentations would need to be well rehearsed. Hillcrest has talented persons who could support this effort.

The worship service sometimes seems rushed or busy. The congregation should be provided time to soak in a particular worship activity before quickly moving to the next item in the worship service. The worship team should evaluate the order of worship and eliminate some of the activities to allow for this. For instance the worship service begins with several corporate prayers, two of which are back to back. This seems awkward to some. The congregation needs more time to find their place in the hymnal and program as the worship service progresses. Additional bibles should be provided for the congregation to support the efforts to have the congregation read the gospel message together. This issue may be solved through the use of multi-media technology or a bulletin insert perhaps.

Hillcrest needs to implement the use of multimedia technology to simplify the service and add visual impact to the music and message. This would reduce difficulty of searching through the hymnal and bible to follow along in the service. Multimedia technology would allow the congregation to look up and see visual images and read the words as the scripture is read or songs are sung. This will allow a greater sense of fellowship and allow members to express themselves more fully since they will not have to fumble with books or papers. The multimedia technology will especially appeal to the youth and younger families.

Hillcrest needs to evaluate the formation of a contemporary worship service. This service could be held on Sunday or even Saturday night. This type service typically involves a praise band. This type service would especially appeal to our youth and younger members. Additional staff would need to be added to accomplish this.

Corporate prayer is vitally important to the spiritual health of the church. The leadership team needs to evaluate an alternate time for corporate prayer. The scheduling of the current prayer time has had a negative impact on some of the adult Sunday school classes that prefer to have an hour for class. If additional

worship services were planned then this time slot for corporate prayer would also present a conflict.

Hillcrest should continue to support the Emmaus spiritual retreat activities. The leadership team should establish an Emmaus activity coordinator to provide the coordination and support of the Emmaus community at Hillcrest.

As Hillcrest builds on its worship and fellowship and nurture activities we must carefully consider the impact on church facility availability. The Administrative council leadership team must carefully make decisions on who uses the facilities and when, so there will be no negative impact on our church growth. Accessibility to the community for its activities is important and allowing the use of our church for Emmaus gatherings and the Hispanic church worship activities is a good thing. These activities must be properly evaluated and scheduled by the leadership team based on the church's needs and purposes.

## **Fellowship**

### **Why is this important?**

Our task is to encourage. "they devoted themselves...to the fellowship...they ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Our God is the God of relationships and fellowship. Jesus calls us to belong, not just believe. People are longing for love and acceptance. People are looking for hope, help, and home. People come to church looking for community not committees. Our church should provide a family for living. An effective church has small group activities that appeal to a person's need for fellowship and sharing and caring. We must be prepared to disciple our congregation and provide them with the Christian accountability they need. An effective church engages in routine visitation to both newcomers and members. A healthy balance between the pastor and lay people is important. In addition, the hospitalized and homebound should be visited as often as possible. A church should find ways to acknowledge and encourage its members for their hard work, dedication, and service to the Lord.

### **What do we do now?**

Hillcrest has several fellowship and accountability groups that meet on a regular basis. There are several fellowship activities that are held on a regular basis. There are several groups that provide a source of fellowship and friendship to other members or persons in the local community. There is a substantial portion of the congregation that does not participate in the accountability and fellowship groups or fellowship activities.

There are two United Methodist women's groups meeting at Hillcrest. One group meets during the day and the other meets at night. The group meeting at night was formed this year. In addition to providing a fellowship opportunity the UMW are very involved in mission activities and support a wide range of church activities. They have organized prayer breakfasts activities, supported VBS, provided food and comfort for church families who have lost loved ones, participated in church bake sales and yard sales. Their mission activities include support of the youth through the ASP project, the support of a child and Christian school in Haiti, and college education support for a Russian orphan. The UMW have been the backbone of the church for many years.

The United Methodist men's group has recently become active again. Like the UMW group, the purpose of the UMM is diverse, providing fellowship and focusing on opportunities for spiritual development and service. The men intend to focus on the long term care of church members as their primary service activity.

A youth group for senior and junior high youth has been active and growing this year. They have led worship services, attended spiritual retreats and Christian music concerts, and engaged in several fund raising and service activities. Adult volunteers lead the group. The youth leaders are currently seeking additional leadership help with the junior high youth.

Several small groups meet for Christian accountability. Some were formed as part of the Emmaus para-church community, which encourages the formation of small reunion groups that engage in spiritual formation and Christian accountability activities. There are two women's and one men's Emmaus group meeting at this time. A few members participate with Emmaus groups outside Hillcrest church. There is a group of men who have been meeting regularly on Saturday mornings for similar purposes. The Fellowship of Christian golfers is another small fellowship group that plays golf together on a routine basis.

Members of the congregation also engage in Christian fellowship activities outside of any of the organized fellowship groups. Several members of Hillcrest attended local Christian concerts during the year and several women in the congregation attended the Women of Faith concert. These are typically announced to the congregation to make them aware of the opportunities. A Christian singles group that meets in the area has members who attend Hillcrest.

Disciple Bible study classes provide a small group fellowship activity. In addition to the focus on the study of God's word and prayer, there is an aspect of Christian accountability and caring. Disciple I class members typically continue meeting together for several years as they work through the progression of Disciple courses offered. This dynamic is also a part of the Wednesday Bible study that has been meeting consistently for a long time.

The children's ministry coordinators hold parties during the year for children age three through fifth grade. The parties generally coincide with major holidays. The Junior church group has begun having a get together known as a Junior Jam. It is intended to hold several of these throughout the year.

Hillcrest offers a monthly fellowship dinner activity for the congregation. There is typically some sort of entertainment or educational activity associated with these dinners. There is an annual picnic in the fall at Loriella Park. We have had an annual Seder dinner that involves teachings on the Jewish Passover traditions. Typical attendance at family night suppers is 40-60 persons.

The Pastor and some individual members of the church visit persons in the congregation who are sick, hospitalized or homebound. We have a group at Hillcrest who go to nursing homes to sing and visit with nursing home residents on a regular basis. We have another group at Hillcrest who hosts tea parties at the homes of members as a special fellowship activity.

The Shepherding or Bearing Care ministry is designed to meet the short-term needs of members and their families who are going through tragedies or experiencing serious illness or health issues. A coordinator receives information from the Pastor, the prayer chain or members of the church and coordinates meals and discerns other needs for members in crisis. It has been effective although needs are not always communicated to the coordinator and some members are not aware of whom to call to receive care from that ministry. In the past Sunshine baskets were delivered to members needing uplifting and encouragement. The

baskets contained an assortment of small items to be opened by the recipient during the week. The current practice is to provide “Caring bears”, to our members in need of encouragement. The “caring bears” are an assortment of teddy bears of all types and shapes located in the front pew of the church that are prayed over and hear the word of God weekly.

The prayer chain is effective in identifying those who are in need of prayer but there is no organized, intentional process for ensuring adequate visitation and contact from the Pastor, the church leadership and the congregation for those in need of continuous or long term fellowship and encouragement and care. The Pastor and many members of the congregation faithfully perform hospital visitation but it is not an intentional or centrally coordinated effort. The church does not have a practice of ensuring the Pastor and church leadership visit all the members from time to time throughout the year.

The Stephen Ministry was implemented at Hillcrest this year. The ministry provides support and encouragement to anyone in need. It is a confidential one-on-one ministry to help those experiencing spiritual or emotional difficulties in their lives.

### **Where is God leading us?**

Small group fellowship and accountability meetings were the heart and soul of the early Methodist movement. The weekly class meetings started by John Wesley were extremely effective in producing strong disciples who were eager to serve the Lord in any way they could. We must vigorously promote membership involvement in small group fellowship and accountability groups. We should continue to promote involvement in the excellent groups that currently exist and we must create new groups that will meet the needs of the diverse membership and train small group leaders to lead and guide these groups. This is an important dynamic in the church and a proven method of deepening the faith and commitment of members if properly implemented. The groups could be set up based on age, marital status, geographic location or some other common bond that will allow friendships to develop and bonds of trust to be formed. Regardless of the focus of the small group they need to engage in some spiritual formation and accountability activities to ensure spiritual growth and the development of a closer relationship with Christ.

The church is competing with other groups, organizations and clubs for the attention of our people. We must exhort our members through the worship teachings, through Christian education activities, through church communications, and through the testimony of fellow Christians to encourage fellowship activity. This expectation of belonging to a small group must become a part of our new member assimilation process.

The leadership team should designate a coordinator to identify those members of the congregation who need visits and special care and ensure communication occurs between the Pastor, church leaders and those serving in this

area to ensure no one gets missed. We need to ensure routine visits are made to our members who are homebound or residing in assisted living facilities.

One possible way to bring the congregation together for fellowship and small group activity is to have a weekly evening gathering at the church. The gathering could be designed to provide time for corporate prayer, worship, study and fellowship time. After a time of common fellowship members could break into small groups and engage in more intimate conversations and accountability activities.

Alpha is a fellowship-evangelism activity designed to introduce seekers to Christ in a non-threatening way. It revolves around a dinner activity with a speaker. Attendees are given a chance to ask questions about Christianity without any pressure to commit to Christ or join the church. This has proven effective for many churches. Hillcrest should explore this as an activity to offer the community Christ.

Hillcrest church should celebrate the spiritual growth of its members by acknowledging the completion of special training, bible studies, confirmation classes and membership classes. Time should be provided in the worship service for these recognition activities. Additionally members and staff should routinely be recognized for their hard work and dedication to the service of the Lord. This type of recognition should highlight God's grace and power to make things happen and be an opportunity to promote mission and service activities. The celebration dinner for our teachers and Bible study leaders is an example of such an activity.

## **Discipleship**

### **Why is this important?**

Our task is to edify. "They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching." We must strengthen people in their walk with God. We must provide people with principles to live by. We must promote the sanctification of our people. Our church should provide a foundation for living. The goal of our education programs should be to help us develop a lifestyle of evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry. We must develop doers of the word and not just hearers of the word. The congregation must be moved from being attenders to active members. We need educational programs for each phase of Christianity including helping people discover their ministry gifts and mission in life. We must be prepared to disciple and minister to new Christians. Challenging people to a serious commitment actually attracts people. We must establish requirements and expectations for commitment for those who choose to join the church. Current members should be encouraged to raise their level of commitment to set an example for the new members.

### **What do we do now?**

Hillcrest offers Christian education activities for all ages. Until recently there had been no Christian education coordinator at Hillcrest for some time. The various areas of Christian education have been functioning based on the self-motivated actions of the members responsible for each area of Christian education at the church. The Pastor and Administrative Council have provided support and oversight as required. There has been a focused effort in the worship services lately to highlight the importance of studying the Bible. Through children's sermons and the message the church leaders have sought to exhort the congregation to be involved in Christian education activities.

The Sunday school program is stable but the average attendance does not represent a large percentage of the congregation. Over the years occasional efforts have been made to stimulate Sunday school attendance. Sunday school classes meet throughout the year including the summer months. There are currently four adult Sunday school classes. One of the adult classes was formed as a follow up to a new member class. There is no particular distinction between the classes regarding age. Each teacher determines the curriculum for his or her class. Some classes are using audio-visual presentations in their classes to facilitate the lesson and others use the traditional book and class discussion methods. There are Sunday school classes for children and youth. There is currently a class for preschool through 1<sup>st</sup> grade, a class for 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and a Junior high youth class for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. A senior high youth Sunday school class has recently been started now that there are students available. There are a limited number of substitute teachers available to fill in for the regular teachers. There have been rare occasions when a teacher did not show up for a class. A nursery is available during the Sunday school hour.

Vacation Bible School is held every summer for children of preschool age through sixth grade. VBS is open to the community and typically half of the attendees are children who don't belong to this church. Attendance has varied over the years ranging from fifty to a hundred students. Hillcrest has never charged a fee for those attending vacation bible school. Vacation Bible School is being held during the mornings from nine to noon. The date varies from year to year and is based on other conflicting activities in the church and the date that best suits the schedule of the VBS leaders. The format has been traditional with classroom instruction supplemented by craft and music activities. The puppet ministry has consistently participated in the VBS program. The congregation has always properly supported VBS. In recent years the VBS closing activities have been incorporated into the Sunday worship service.

Children's church and Junior church are part of the children's ministries program and offer further Christian education activities for our children. These classes meet during the worship service after the completion of the children's sermon. Children's church, for ages three through seven, meets each week and the Junior church, for second through fifth grade, meets every other week. These classes provide children with age appropriate learning activities and allow the older members of the congregation to focus on the sermon without distractions. This is an important ministry function because the message is a critical part of the worship experience. The children's ministry leaders have prepared a curriculum and provide the volunteers with material with which to prepare their lesson. There has been occasional difficulty with finding enough volunteers so that no one has to fill in too often.

Hillcrest offers a limited number of Bible study activities. The Disciple bible study curriculum has been offered for many years. Disciple Bible Study classes meet for thirty plus weeks with classes usually beginning in the fall and running through spring. There are three separate Disciple classes that are designed to be taken consecutively. The studies require a serious commitment to read and study God's word. The disciple classes have been very instrumental in the spiritual development of the congregation. The class is designed for twelve persons but for some time there has been insufficient interest within the congregation and the classes have been smaller. Due to limited interest there will be no Disciple 1 class in the current teaching cycle. There is currently a small list of members who participate in teaching disciple classes. There is a long-standing bible study conducted on Wednesday mornings at the church. It is mainly attended by members of the United Methodist Women's group. There have been some sporadic small group bible studies conducted by members of the congregation. These are typically done amongst the few small groups that meet for Christian accountability and fellowship activities. There are no short term, topical bible studies held at church during the evenings or weekend. There are no in depth Bible studies available to members of the congregation who have completed the Disciple Bible study series.

The Pastor offers membership classes and confirmation classes on demand. These classes cover the basics of the Christian faith and Methodist beliefs and traditions.

The church has purchased a membership in a satellite TV Christian broadcast network. The shows are usually taped for the convenience of the interested members because they are not often shown at times convenient to the majority of the congregation. The presentations cover a wide variety of Christian education and training activities.

### **Where is God leading us?**

A strong Christian education program is vital to a healthy, spirit-filled church. All members need to be encouraged to be involved in some aspect of Christian education. The leadership team needs to continue to focus on encouraging the members to grow spiritually through the study of God's word. Hillcrest needs to establish an overall Christian education plan that ensures the basics of Christianity and Methodist doctrine are taught on a periodic basis. A formal process for training and equipping our teachers is essential to this process. In addition to the basics of the Christian faith we need to teach on topics such as Christian history, spiritual disciplines and spiritual gifts.

We need an active, aggressive Christian education coordinator to focus on our discipleship processes. Careful consideration should be given to adding a staff member to focus on this area. We need to add staff in the areas that will bring about the greatest change in individual and congregational growth. We should not wait until the crowd is large but should be proactive, trusting God to provide the souls when we are ready to minister to them.

One of the most critical areas for impacting the spiritual health of Hillcrest church is our method for assimilating new members. We must develop a process for bringing new members into the church that challenges them to a serious commitment. Those seeking membership at Hillcrest should understand that we are serious about our faith and have something special to offer. They should understand that Jesus has expectations for His people regarding spiritual development and service. The process should involve a series of educational activities that focus on the four areas of Christian development; knowing Christ (commitment to membership), growing in Christ (commitment to maturity), serving Christ (commitment to ministry), sharing Christ (commitment to missions). A formal covenant would be made after each phase to become further involved in such things as Christian education, fellowship activities and service to the church. Current members, especially the church leadership, should be strongly encouraged to participate in these education and commitment activities to set an example for the new members and to refresh their knowledge of the basics of Christianity, Methodist doctrine, spiritual gifts and spiritual disciplines.

As we improve our evangelism efforts to attract the unchurched, we need to have a program in place to indoctrinate new believers. A program called "Alpha" has

proven to be an effective way to evangelize and educate people interested in the Christian faith in a way that is simple and non-threatening. We should evaluate and consider utilizing this training and fellowship process as we reach out more aggressively into our community to attract people to Christ.

The Sunday school attendance at Hillcrest needs to be improved. A dedicated staff member who will focus on Christian education activities is essential to make this happen. We need to establish teacher-training activities, assist teachers with selecting a curriculum, introduce technology where appropriate, and establish classes that meet the needs of most members of the congregation.

As our congregation grows and becomes more involved in Christian education activities we must be prepared to reorganize our Sunday school classes for the younger children and create another Sunday school class that will better align the children's age groups. A class for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders should be formed. There is one classroom in our present facility that is not being used and would provide a place for this new class. As we receive more young families in the church, consideration should also be given to offering a young adult class. We need to evaluate whether to modify our summer time Sunday school program. This would be a good time to give our regular teachers some time off to rest and rejuvenate. Classes could be combined, substitute teachers could be used or some type of common group activity could be created to provide continuous learning through the summer months.

Currently our Sunday school classes meet during the time period between the two worship services. Should Hillcrest incorporate a contemporary worship service during the time usually allotted for Sunday school, then consideration must be given to holding Sunday school at two separate times on Sunday to accommodate both services.

Vacation Bible School should be heavily advertised in the community and the congregation should fully support this education activity. This can be an even more influential ministry in our community if we are able to attract more children. Hillcrest should expand its VBS to include 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Consideration should be given to holding an additional VBS during the evening hours. Holding a VBS during the evening hours accommodates the needs of working adults and youth and allows them to attend VBS or participate as part of the VBS staff. Hillcrest held a VBS during the evening one year. We had a successful adult and senior high youth class although the number of young children was considerably less than the daytime VBS attendance.

Our church needs to establish additional bible studies for members who can't meet during the day and can't commit to a Disciple bible study class. Hillcrest needs a bible study for members who have completed the disciple study series. A Pastor led study makes the most sense for those members who have been teaching or have completed the disciple series and are seeking to be fed spiritually.

Additional bible study could be incorporated into a weekly family night activity at church.

Hillcrest needs to aggressively promote the use of our satellite television network. This can be an excellent tool for teaching, and equipping our congregation to make them more effective teachers, evangelists, and leaders. Viewing of teaching and training presentations could be coordinated with fellowship dinners or other similar activities to enhance attendance.

## **Service**

### **Why is this important?**

Our task is to Equip. "They gave to anyone as he had need." We must help people find their ministry and train them so they have the skills to be successful in that ministry. We need educational programs for each phase of Christianity including helping people discover their ministry gifts and mission in life. Effective churches nurture their leaders to be relational and caring with individuals in the church and community. They need to be leaders not enablers to properly inspire and motivate the congregation to implement God's plan for the church. The church should provide a function for living. Several key mission activities should be identified that fulfill God's calling for our church. They will naturally utilize our special strengths and spiritual gifts and should satisfy substantial needs within the community served. The congregation will need to be trained to be competent at these mission activities.

### **What do we do now?**

The committee on lay leadership meets annually in the fall to discern who God is calling to take charge of the church leadership and ministry positions. Members are asked through Pastoral letters and other communication activities to prayerfully consider where God is calling them to serve. Some leaders have continued in their area of service for many years. Other members come forward and volunteer to serve in the areas they feel called to serve. Several positions are typically filled when the nominations committee calls and exhorts members to consider serving in a particular area. The key leadership and ministry positions are always filled but finding members to support some of the key ministries, committees, and teaching activities is where Hillcrest experiences problems.

The expectations and responsibilities for many ministries and leadership positions are not well communicated. Little written instructions or guidelines for how to conduct our specific ministries exists at this time. The United Methodist church does publish guidelines for key ministries and leadership positions and some leaders have obtained copies to assist in their ministry activities. The Methodist Book of Discipline provides some information on leadership responsibilities but this book is not familiar to many members and not well distributed. Position descriptions do exist for staff members.

Hillcrest has provided some opportunities for the training and equipping of its people for ministry. Over the years there has been some periodic training on recognizing and using Spirit Gifts. The most recent teaching was conducted a couple summers ago and was called Life Keys training. Disciple I bible study has a short segment on Spirit gifts. A comprehensive video training activity, entitled The 7 Laws of the Learner, was offered to the congregation to assist in the training of teachers. Ashland district leadership training events for youth and children's ministers, teachers, and other church leadership positions is offered on a periodic

basis. Stephen ministry training was offered this year resulting in the qualification of several Stephen Ministers. The CCN broadcast network in which Hillcrest participates provides excellent training opportunities.

### **Where is God leading us?**

Hillcrest needs to establish a culture of service within our church. We do not have a strong program for training and equipping people to serve. We must establish educational opportunities for members to discover their spirit gifts and establish expectations for using those gifts to serve in the church and community.

New members must quickly be introduced into the culture of serving at Hillcrest by being provided opportunities to serve. Obviously, new Christians will not be asked to teach classes or take on key leadership positions as would mature Christians joining our congregation, but there is much that they can do. On the job mentoring is all the training required in some cases. would be The Disciple Bible study classes have this emphasis on service built into the curriculum. If carefully stressed these classes will provide one method of re-enforcing this important facet of Christian discipleship. Our new member development classes must emphasize this aspect of Christian discipleship as well. A list of all service and ministry opportunities and the qualifications for serving in those areas needs to be developed.

We are competing with the community for the time and talents of our members. The church leaders must encourage our members to dedicate their time and talents to Christ through the worship teachings, churchwide communications, Christian education activities and the testimony of members.

We need to intentionally develop leaders to take over key positions such as VBS director or children's ministry coordinator. We need to recruit and train new teachers for our Sunday schools and Disciple Bible studies.

We need to develop guidelines and instructions for our leadership positions and ministry activities that specifically address the details of how Hillcrest operates. This should be created in conjunction with any organizational changes that are approved by the Administrative council. The Methodist Book of Discipline and the Cokesbury guidelines for leading the congregation should be consulted to assist in this effort and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the United Methodist Church.

All training activities that are used to train our leaders and equip our members to serve should be paid for out of the church budget. Money should never be a barrier to participating in training and educational activities.

## **Church Facilities and Organization**

### **Why is this important?**

The congregation must be prepared for growth and must adapt to a changing society in the way it relates to the members and the community, especially the youth and younger families. The message is never compromised but the methods change with each new generation. The worship service and spiritual growth ministries are the real key to the satisfaction of the members and health of the church but the condition of the facilities does impact the first impression we make on guests and people of the community. Inadequate parking facilities or overcrowded worship services will impact long term attendance and participation in church activities. The budget of the church should reflect it's vision and priorities and should align with scripture and the mission and goals of the Methodist church. The church leadership should be organized to be effective and to focus on our key missions and activities. The church leaders must frequently communicate God's vision for the church and the plans and goals to achieve that vision to the congregation of the church. The leadership team must constantly re-assess its progress and the health of the church and needs of the community.

### **What do we do now?**

The current structure of the church leadership is dictated largely by the requirements of the Methodist church as outlined in the Book of Discipline. There are certain required positions and committees but there is freedom to create additional positions and ministries. The Admin Council meets every other month to discuss church business and receive reports from the leaders and coordinators of the various ministry groups and committees in the church. A Program Planning committee met at one time at Hillcrest during the month between Admin Council meetings to discuss the details of the ministry activities. This has not been the case for over a year. Individual ministry meet as required and report to the Admin Council.

Our sanctuary is currently large enough to support the present membership. Each Sunday at the eleven o'clock service there are usually several unfilled pews and the attendance at the eight-fifteen service rarely exceeds forty or more persons. The fellowship hall is inadequate to support our fellowship activities. The fellowship hall is used for meetings and can be cordoned off to create separate rooms for Sunday school, bible study or VBS classes as required. Our kitchen has recently been upgraded and contains conventional and microwave ovens, an icemaker, and a new dishwasher. Our storage facilities are not adequate for the requirements of our many ministries.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for upkeep of the church facilities and grounds. They have been very active and have made many improvements to the exterior and interior of the church. There have been improvements in the landscaping and the bathrooms have been remodeled. Numerous repairs to the

facility have been made. The Boy Scouts recently constructed a playground for our children complete with picnic tables.

The church has not had any concerns with meeting its budget in recent years. The majority of the budget is used to support the salaries of the staff and for the upkeep of the church.

A Master plan was developed by an Architect many years ago and has not been implemented. There are currently no plans to add any church buildings, enlarge the facility or purchase additional land or buildings.

### **Where is God leading us?**

Planning is based on strengths, hopes, and objectives. Its focus is always on God's plan for the church. This plan should be written down and communicated to the congregation so everyone will know what God is calling Hillcrest to do and to be, and how we are going to accomplish this vision. A streamlined decision making process should be used but it should be open and honest and well communicated. Leaders should be sensitive to the concerns of the congregation. Communication within the church will be extremely important in helping the church transition to support God's new move. Changes must be discussed and evaluated by the leadership team before being presented to the congregation. We don't need to have the congregation vote on everything God is telling us to do but we need to explain the scriptural basis of what we are doing and how it will benefit them. The position of communicator must be filled and properly utilized to keep the leadership and congregation properly informed and updated on what we are doing and what opportunities are available for service and education and fellowship.

We should organize our leadership around the five purposes identified in Acts 4. An outreach or evangelism team will focus on bringing people into the church including the evangelism training. The worship or magnification team will oversee the worship services and music. The fellowship or membership team will care for the flock overseeing the support groups, membership classes, hospital visitation and major fellowship events. Look for people who are not just competent but passionate about being involved in one of the purposes of the church. Start with volunteers to oversee the five key purposes and eventually work to obtaining a paid staff.

The church has adequate freedom to re-organize its leadership structure to become more efficient and effective and to improve communications. This will be an important adjustment to ensure changes are properly evaluated, planned, communicated to the congregation, and then executed. Our planning and leadership groups will need to meet more often to approve, coordinate, and implement the changes God has for us at least for the near term. Church leaders will need to commit to meeting more often until we have identified the actions we will take, the methods we will use, and have delegated those actions to the appropriate ministries and coordinators. Adding staff in the key area or areas of focus should be seriously

pursued to ensure the greatest chance for success. Success in one area will spill over into other areas of ministry and church activity.

Each item in the budget should be categorized by the purpose it supports or to which it relates. Our priorities will be reflected in our budget. God will provide if we are faithful. God's work done God's way will not lack support. We just need to educate the congregation on the purpose of giving and the spiritual need it provides. People give to people so mission activities need to be well communicated. All expenses for training and educational activities that are identified by the leadership team as important and essential to the development of our members and ministries should be paid for out of the church budget. Money should never be a barrier to the training and equipping of our people. Our budget should reflect the expense of training and equipping our members, adding multi-media equipment for the worship service, adding to our staff, increased evangelism and mission activity, and upgrading or building on to our facilities. We need to consider purchasing a bus or van to facilitate fellowship and mission activities within our congregation.

The Hillcrest congregation needs to establish a team to focus on our facility improvement and future building needs. Our fellowship hall and storage facilities are inadequate for the activities in which we engage. The classroom space is just adequate and may not support additional Sunday school classes or a larger Vacation Bible School attendance. An empty sanctuary or a crowded sanctuary is a turn off to the congregation. Additional worship services can alleviate issues with any future overcrowding without increasing the size of the sanctuary. Construction of a new sanctuary must be carefully considered based on projected growth. Adequate Sunday school facilities must exist where distracting activities don't interfere with lessons. An adequate fellowship area is important to encourage involvement in fellowship activities.

As Hillcrest builds on its worship and fellowship and nurture activities we must carefully consider the impact on church facility availability. The Administrative council leadership team must carefully make decisions on who uses the facilities and when, so there will be no negative impact on our church growth. Accessibility to the community for its activities is important and allowing the use of our church for Emmaus gatherings and the Hispanic church worship activities is a good thing. These activities must be properly evaluated and scheduled by the leadership team based on the church's needs and purposes. A central place or method for recording the schedule of events, and which areas of the facility will be in use needs to be developed.

The congregation needs to be open minded about future changes to our facilities. We may need to consider removing the pews from the sanctuary to add seating and allow for multi-purpose use of the sanctuary. We may want to add a structure onto our current site for fellowship activities. We may want to consider the purchase of property near the church as a satellite worship and fellowship

facility. We don't have to have every church building directly adjacent to the current church building and grounds.

Inadequate parking can inhibit attendance. Increasing the number of worship services can alleviate this problem. This will need to be a consideration for future growth. Landscaping impacts the perception of your church. A poorly maintained yard or building doesn't make a good impression. Our trustees have done a good job in this area but must remain vigilant.

We should consider increasing the visibility of our leaders by developing an organizational chart with pictures and place it in a centrally located place in the church. New members should be celebrated similarly by displaying their names and pictures in a visible location so the congregation can learn their names and come to know them better.

## **God's Call to Act**

### **Outreach**

1. Evaluate the worship and ministry needs of the community.
2. Evaluate the use of the Alpha program for evangelism.
3. Encourage the congregation to engage in friendship evangelism.
4. Provide training opportunities on evangelism techniques.
5. Aggressively advertise VBS to community.
6. Offer an open house for the community.
7. Establish the communication position and initiate additional advertisement of church activities.
8. Establish greeters at 8:15 service and establish practice of door greeters for 11:00 worship service.
9. Review greeter and bread ministry practices for lessons learned and possible improvements.
10. Increase visibility of church leaders at worship services.

### **Worship**

1. Establish a worship team to plan worship services and identify the teaching needs of congregation. Include the music director and establish a drama coordinator, and multi-media coordinator. Evaluate the music and order of worship.
2. Pastor should evaluate use of the lectionary and ensure the teachings cover life issue topics and stress Christian discipleship responsibilities.
3. Staff-Parish relations committee should review pastor's schedule and responsibilities and assist in delegation of tasks and responsibilities that detract from primary tasks.
4. Establish choirs for children and youth.
5. Determine methods to encourage the congregation to attend special worship services.
6. Implement the use of multi-media technology to enhance the worship services.
7. Evaluate the formation of a contemporary worship service.
8. Evaluate our corporate prayer activity to determine how to increase attendance.
9. Establish an Emmaus group coordinator.

### **Fellowship**

1. Create additional small groups for accountability and fellowship. Train leaders.
2. Use the worship teaching to exhort the congregation to participate in fellowship activities. Church leaders need to intentionally encourage the members.
3. Include commitment to a small group activity in the new member assimilation process.
4. Establish a coordinator for the long term care and visitation of our members.
5. Establish a weekday fellowship, prayer, and Christian education event at the church.
6. Intentionally celebrate the successes and accomplishments of church members and ministries and staff through recognition activities.

## **Discipleship**

1. Establish an overall Christian education plan that promotes a culture of learning and ensures the basics of Christianity and Methodist doctrine are periodically taught.
2. Establish a process for continuous training and equipping of our teachers and bible study leaders.
3. Establish a process for the assimilation of new members. It should include educational activities that focus on the four areas of Christian development and require a formal covenant to engage in service, fellowship, and nurture activities.
4. Add a staff member to focus on Christian education and youth fellowship.
5. Implement a plan for improving Sunday school attendance. Evaluate summer time Sunday school program. Evaluate the formation of a young adult SS class.
6. Expand VBS to include 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Evaluate establishing an additional VBS this year that meets at night.
7. Establish additional bible studies for members who can't meet during the day and can't commit to a disciple bible study class.
8. Aggressively promote the use of our satellite television network for Christian education activities.

## **Service**

1. Establish a culture of serving through the worship teachings, and a new member assimilation process.
2. Create educational opportunities for all members to discover their spirit gifts and establish expectations for serving.
3. Develop a list of all service and ministry opportunities and the qualifications and requirements for serving.
4. Develop guidelines and instructions for all our leadership positions and ministry activities with the details of how Hillcrest operates.
5. Recruit and train new teachers for our Sunday school, VBS, and Bible Study activities.
6. Establish a financial policy that all training and equipping Christian education activities will be paid for out of the church budget.
7. Aggressively promote our satellite television network and Ashland District training events as methods for training and equipping our members.

## **Facilities and Organization**

1. Create a document that describes God's vision for our church and the specifics of how we will accomplish that vision. Formally communicate this plan to the church through as many means as possible prior to implementation.
2. Consider re-structuring the leadership organization to provide for more frequent and efficient meetings with a focus on the five fold purposes of the church.
3. Review the protocol for communicating changes within the church amongst the leadership team so changes are properly planned, communicated and executed.
4. Add an additional staff in the area of Christian education and youth ministries.
5. Establish a team to focus on our facility improvement and future building needs.
6. Evaluate the purchase of a bus or van for fellowship and ministry activities.
7. Establish a coordinator to keep track of church activities and approve facility use.

# HILLCREST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ASSESSMENT OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES  
AND VISION FOR OUR FUTURE

Jim Crossman  
December 14<sup>th</sup> 2003