

State of the Church Report

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

Over a year ago at our annual planning retreat we engaged in a long overdue discussion about the life and health of Hillcrest church. We took a hard look at all that God had done in the past and all that God was doing now in our midst. I think God wanted to revive, to re-ignite, to strengthen our passion for the last, the least, the lost. The same passion that drove Christ to the cross. I believe God's purpose for that retreat was to inspire and encourage us to ask the question "Isn't there something more God has for us?" So we rejoiced at all that God had done and then asked ourselves; "Where is God taking us?" "What do we focus on and how do we organize and guide our congregation to be the church God is calling us to be now?" The retreat was all about rejoicing for "what is" but yearning deeply for "what could be." The following topics were discussed;

1. Discuss/identify God's specific vision(s) for Hillcrest.
2. In conjunction with item 1, identify strengths of the church and congregation. (They should tie together)
3. Determine who we think we are called to reach in our community and determine our geographic area. (we can't reach everyone and everywhere in the f'burg area.)

4. Thoroughly review our worship service and sermons and music to determine if it is effective. (this is the most critical thing to do well both to attract and keep new people and established members)
5. Discuss how we can better assimilate new members and how we can put in place expectations for the involvement of current members.
6. Discuss how we can intentionally reach out to the community
7. Discuss the most important needs of our congregation and whether they are being met.
8. Discuss ideas for christian education.

The following sentiment I think described the prevailing mood of the church leadership when the weekend ended.

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 we believe God is calling us to work together to become an even greater blessing to this community. We believe God is calling Hillcrest to discover and embrace God's vision for our church and its purpose in the community. 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 we 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.

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.

As a result of our conversations a church assessment was written (see attached document). The assessment contained information on all that God had been doing at Hillcrest in regard to ministry and mission and discussed where God may be leading us going forward. We knew we must diligently pray and study God's word to discern His will for us and we did just that. The leadership team met twice early in the year to pray and talk about what God had put on our hearts. Attendance was good as the leadership team began to see God moving in our church in a new and exciting way. The results of that meeting were that some ministry and mission activities were identified for action with some others identified as requiring more prayer and meditation. (The meeting minutes are attached for review) We continue to emphasize corporate prayer at Hillcrest so that God's will remains clear. "Where there is no vision, the people perish... Prov 29:18" became a key verse for the leadership team this year. Below is a summary of all that God has done in our midst this year based first on our perceived focus areas for Hillcrest, and then again on traditional categories of church organization ;

God's Vision for Hillcrest;

A church that loves to pray and worship

- Sermons focused on the power of prayer
- Effective prayer chain ministry
- Sunday morning corporate prayer
- Monthly prayer time on Sunday evening
- Corporate prayer during church meetings/activities
- Numerous worship service opportunities during the year
- Weekly communion

A church that loves God's word

- Sermons based on scripture
- Reading the Gospel scripture together during worship
- Disciple bible study program
- Wednesday Bible study
- Sunday School/children's church
- Vacation Bible School
- Youth bible study activities
- Scripture memorization verse

A church that cares for it's own

- Caring ministry for women
- Manna meals, hospital visitation, caring bears)
- Stephen ministry
- Special fundraisers (Grinnan, Wendt, Shank, caring ministry for women)
- Bereavement meals
- Fellowship groups
- Fellowship dinners
- Recognition events
- Facility improvements and upgrades

A church in mission to the community

- United Methodist Women/OWLS (missionary support)
- United Methodist Men (Camp Rainbow, caring ministry for women)
- United Methodist Youth (Appalachian Service Project, caring ministry fundraiser)
- Missionary support (Judy Matheney, Pastor Yafet Unawekia)
- Vacation Bible School
- Fall family festival
- Veterans celebration
- Church Mission activities; (Dove, Angel tree, Thanksgiving/Christmas families, Christmas in April)
- Support for Salvation Army, Bethany Christian Services, RAACAP, Hope House and Homeless shelter
- Cramer Closet Food Pantry
- Nursing Home singers
- Doors open to boy scouts, girl scouts, RAACAP, Spanish congregation

KEY FOCUS AREAS;

(based on assessment and leadership meetings)

- 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. **(WORKING)**
- Our caring ministry should be expanded to provide for the long-term care of 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. **(COMPLETE)**
- 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. **(COMPLETE-NO MAJOR CHANGES-some multi-media introduced)**
- 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. **(COMPLETE)**
- 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. **(NO ACTION YET)**
- 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 promotes a culture of learning and 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. **(ADVERTISING NOW FOR THE POSITION) (MORE YOUTH LEADERS HELPING)**
- 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. **(NO ACTION YET)**
- 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. **(SURVEYS CONDUCTED-SERMONS PROMOTE SERVICE-TESTIMONIALS GIVEN)**

OTHER AREAS OF FOCUS

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.

God's Call to Act

1. Evaluate the worship and ministry needs of the community. **(complete)**
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. **(complete)**
6. Offer an open house for the community. **(priority-complete)**
7. Establish the communication position and initiate additional advertisement of church activities. **(priority-complete)**
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. **(priority)**
10. Increase visibility of church leaders at worship services.

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.

God's Call to Act

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. **(priority-complete)**
2. The Pastor should evaluate use of the lectionary and ensure the teachings cover life issue topics and stress Christian discipleship responsibilities.
3. The Staff-Parish relations committee should review pastor's schedule and responsibilities and assist in delegation of tasks and responsibilities that detract from primary tasks. **(priority-complete)**
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. **(complete-used several times to introduce to congregation)**
7. Evaluate the formation of a contemporary worship service. **(complete-not at this time)**
8. Evaluate our corporate prayer activity to determine how to increase attendance **(TOP Priority-complete)**
9. Establish an Emmaus group coordinator.

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.

God's Call to Act

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. **(partially complete)**
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. **(priority-complete)**
5. Establish a weekday fellowship, prayer, and Christian education event at the church. **(priority-no action yet)**
6. Intentionally celebrate the successes and accomplishments of church members and ministries and staff through recognition activities. **(complete-on-going)**

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.

God's Call to Act

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. **(priority-no action yet-DCE job posted)**
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 activity. **(priority-no action yet)**
4. Add a staff member to focus on Christian education and youth fellowship. **(DCE job posted-additional youth help found)**
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 7th and 8th grade. Evaluate establishing an additional VBS this year that meets at night. **(complete- nine 7-8th grade students)**
7. Establish additional bible studies for members who can't meet during the day and can't commit to a disciple bible study class. **(Large response to disciple bible studies)**
8. Aggressively promote the use of our satellite television network for Christian education activities.

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.

God's Call to Act

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. **(TOP Priority-not done)**
3. Develop a list of all service and ministry opportunities and the qualifications and requirements for serving. **(complete-survey conducted)**
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. **(complete)**
7. Aggressively promote our satellite television network and Ashland District training events as methods for training and equipping our members. **(partially done)**

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 its 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.

God's Call to Act

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. **(assessment published-newsletter communicates vision monthly)**
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 member in the area of Christian education and youth ministries. **(working)**
5. Establish a team to focus on our facility improvement and future building needs. **(complete-working)**
6. Evaluate the purchase of a bus or van for fellowship and ministry activities. **(God provides free bus)**
7. Establish a coordinator to keep track of church activities and approve facility use. **(TOP Priority-no action yet-web calender developed)**

TESTIMONIALS - disciple class,stephen ministry,caring ministry,service-newsletter/worship service

GENEROSITY -7% increase in mission giving, special funds, meeting budget,

Col 3:12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

HILLCREST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



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