

**“In the Midst of New Dimensions” (long-range planning)
Vermillion United Church of Christ, Congregational
October, 2011**

Steve Ward, facilitator

Attendees: Jason Askew, Amy Askew, Mary Malone, Karon Fuller, Mike Marek, John Jordre, Becca Jordre, Phyllis Noble, Jack Noble, Paula Keller

Strengths

Steve Miller

Tradition – long history of good work

Music

Openness to all

Active membership

Diverse membership – age

Prominent location

Ties to university

Around the room:

Steve Miller – takes us to our historical roots

Young people-youth programs and confirmation- and the attractiveness by others not in the church*

Coffee Hi – allows for community

Enthusiasm of membership/positive willingness to do new things, engagement, variety of opportunities**

Diversity of religious background/age/university-town

Tradition – not a church with a doctrine**

Keeping worship alive by doing different things

Talent-laden

Accepting of newness/Welcoming atmosphere – no discrimination*

Outreach to Native community

Large numbers

Support for fine arts (music)*

Connection to larger group so that we can help with national/international issues.

We connect with USD well.

How much is Steve’s influence a part of all of these positives?

He is extremely important, but we need to be careful that we are not simply “Steve’s church”.

How do we avoid relying on a short-term solution to the day when Steve retires?

We need to rely on our strong membership to keep enthusiasm high.

Constitutional process

Can we develop an internship program?

Room for improvement?

Steve needs to give up some control

The land we have purchased will need some purpose

More money pledged

Develop a greater sense of commitment in the broader membership
Outreach to Vermillion's disparity in education/wealth

Communication – internal and external – rely too much on word of mouth, need to be more active in telling the outside world and communicating within* Mid-week update.

Members need to take more active role in leadership – intentional effort to share the load

Add to the projects – USD students in particular

Adult Service projects need to increased – once a year project over a weekend to reach out to local/state/regional concern – set an example for younger people* We need to be out in the community more.

Build on the newly acquired land – current building not ideal of LAF – gym with classrooms?

Short-term bible study opportunities needed – book or history of bible stuff – short-term more likely to keep people involved.

Recognize talents more – garden is a great example of what can

Unfocused enthusiasm* - we need to focus on short-term commitments

Need to expect more individual monetary commitment* - Short-term goals to keep people engaged in the financial life of the church to offset costs in budget. Organize giving around specific items.

We can be segregating – there can be in-groups/cliques/factions that sometimes do not meet the ideal we seek

We have Sunday people and Wednesday people – LAF invites everyone even if you don't volunteer.

Ties to Association and State Conference – we do not rely on these entities as much as others do b/c Steve is not interested –

Opportunities for building a stronger church

Internship program for pastor

Building a gym/kitchen on the land next door-in time

Developing a stronger communication system

Developing a talents database

Focusing on short-term commitments for individuals in the church

Focusing on short-term projects for members to become active outside of the church

Two annual meetings?

Define changes in mindset of generations – adjust communication/church organization accordingly

Shelter/Food place next to the church – one-stop shop

Organizational structure that will survive Steve's retirement needed (internship, fundraising, service projects, programs) so that they are not completely reliant on Steve

Communicate better by defining our brand and communicating expectations for membership

Plan and communicate plan

Use current resources to plan for members 100 years from now

Know individuals better – online, bulletin board

Focus more on USD students

Could we use USD students and land to create a community service center based – partner with USD to facilitate service-learning, employ USD students to use as out-reach labor/organizers centralized out of our land, but with only a tangential connection to the ministers and church staff.

Church might pay one person to coordinate efforts.

Garden wall where ashes could be left.

Pay Elaine more.

Mike Carlson, facilitator

Attendees: Amanda Dickenson, Fern Kaufman, Chuck Kaufman, Diane Leja, Howard Coker, Mecia Graham, Becky Rider, Marjory Coker, Sandy Dickenson

What are the Church's current strengths?

Prayer

Pastors

Educated membership challenged to think

Music; quality, ability to participate

Essential good will, caring, accepting

Kids programs, LAF, BC, Bible School, confirmation vs. conformation

Multigenerational, youth participation

Ministry to children

Congregation willing to welcome new people

Community local congregational church, make our own decisions

Old sturdy building plenty of property

Member resources based on monthly salary providing giving financial stability

Coffee hi provides social time each Sunday, other social events

Commitment, openness, welcoming, diversity

Comfort and feeling of extended family in the church

Relationship with Native American Community

Congenial and skilled office staff

Connection to USD

Strong traditions and heritage

Doing long range planning

Where is there room for improvement?

Evaluate all programs even if they are working to see that they are meeting everyone's needs.

Can they be improved, do not be afraid to ask the hard questions

More lay members involved in LAF

Programs for after confirmation so we do not lose the youth

Need to keep the high school age group involved

Need to involve the college students

Revisit the adult programs similar to what is being done for Women's Fellowship

Develop a support group for members of our community in need such as Alzheimer's, grief, hospice

People to help other who are in need even if it is just to listen

We are encouraged to meet and interact with the new members but it would be nice to have pictures and maybe the bio's on the web site so names can be put with faces making it easier to start up conversation. Maybe even the pictures on the bulletin board in the basement. Do not bring back the name tags.

Are we really as welcoming as we think we are? "No longer strangers" Are contacts being made to visitors listed in the ritual of friendship?

We do a poor job of communicating the financial picture of the church. Some Sundays the bulletin lists the needed income and income to date. Need income and expenses to date as compared to budget.

Lack of attendance at the annual meeting as well as church meetings even the cottage meetings reflects the need to get members involved.

We do not communicate the activities of the boards and committees. Need minutes of board and committee meetings available for the membership. Are the committees and boards meeting?

Need to get more members involved in the church similar to when Steve was on sabbatical we came together and got things done.

Need more events, more road trips (social director)

Reach out to the international community

Acoustics in the basement also may need to be addressed in the sanctuary

The facilities do not lend themselves to all the programs and activities being conducted. ie. On Sunday morning, adult study, choir, set up for coffee are all in the same areas

Parking and playground area

Once the long term planning is done need to review job descriptions of staff to see if they are moving in the direction outlined by the long term plan

Do not hear about a stewardship program for the youth even if it is a small amount the instills the ownership for the church.

Stronger connection to the conference.

Need to evaluate the threats that face the church and develop a plan instead of reacting

What are our best opportunities for building a stronger Church into the future?

Divide up into smaller groups to accomplish tasks such as support groups, study groups, book club

Evaluating the church programs annually to build on strengths and correct weaknesses

Need to find ways to keep the youth involved as they are our future.

More creative programming such as theater, arts, drama, skits, music

Develop more involvement with the Native American and international students in the community.

By providing more information such as minutes of board and committee meetings the membership will have ownership. The Bell could provide this information.

Review options of renting available space in the community before building new with debt.

Review space needs for future growth and programs, consider including a small chapel, library, choir room.

Work with the university on an internship for youth education with LAF

Develop a sexton program to meet as needed to do repairs on the church.

May need a volunteer coordinator

Develop quiet meeting areas in the church

Some programs appear to be conducted by just a few, need to encourage them to recruit other members to keep from burning out a few and involving more will build a stronger membership.

Encourage leadership in the community and conference

Susan Tuve, Facilitator

Attendees: Sandy Lavin, Mary Edelen, Linda Wymar, Ann Settles, Nancy Zuercher, Kathy Carlson, Mike Carlson, DebThomas, Keith Thomas, Cal Peterson, Parker Knox, Rhonda Hulkonen, Dave Hulkonen, Susan Tuve, Douglas Tuve

Strengths:	# of People listing this as a strength
LAF, all kid's programs	All
Physical building with a sense of history	7
Excellent music program	all
Strong core members	3
Diversity of people	3
Worship, preaching, taize	8
Welcoming	3
Ministerial staff	all
Willingness to look to future	4
Community Involvement	5
Sufficient funds	2
Not being told what to believe (lack of absolutes)	2
Strengths in ceremonies	1
Other items:	
Garden	
Off street parking	
Location in city	
Campus Involvement	
Native American involvement - Steve	

What could we do Better?

Membership and attendance could improve	4
Changing face of worship	
Baptize & Confirmed - they do not show up, Perhaps volunteers could become substitute 'grandparents'	
We do a wonderful job with programming but we should have things happening 12 hours a day.	
How about yoga classes, or low income breakfast?	
Problem is we need more enthusiasm and it takes more funding & more staff.	
We need PR out there. Some see us as USD's church. Need to break down the town/gown barrier.	
Need to pave the parking lot.	
We have a beautiful building but need to be more handicapped accessible.	
Need more private spaces.	
When someone joins, we should expect a commitment. Maybe we need mentors for new members.	
Are we the church of committees? If you see a need, do it.	
We need to make sure people know we are are GLBT friendly.	
Make sure Middle School and High School students see us as a safe place.	
Building outside needs better lighting.	
In winter, sidewalks can get icy - too dangerous for older people.	
Choir loft is too small and too dark.	
Need rest rooms on main floor.	

Financial Resources:

Trust Fund

Better job of stewardship.

What are the best opportunities for building a stronger church in the future?

Challenges:

More traditional hymns

Focus:

Involve young people in a children's music program - maybe offer music lessons

Music school for all ages - a laboratory

More opportunities for young mothers (or fathers) with preschoolers

Mesh our generations and social groups - maybe bring other age groups into

Wednesday activities

Vibrant ministry must continue

We have done the right thing in acquiring land.

Need a task force consisting of a variety of people who can help give us more focus.

Need the parking lot paved.

Lisha Edelen, facilitator

Attendees: Alice Barnes, Cyndy Chaney, David Hulac, Joan Holter, Vern Holter, Elaine Miller, Dave Moen, Julie Moen, Jack Powell, Lisa Ketcham, Kay Powell, Thelma Raines

1. What are the Church's current strengths?

- great place with young children/family
- wide range of ages - young to the elderly
- music and music team - lots of gifted people in general
- LAF program: 1 week served 168 meals (slower day would be 80 meals); slower the last couple of weeks because of Vermillion community events (Jolley group was the same number however)
- diversity and energy of pastors and staff
- great sermons and Sunday services
- open to anyone - slogan "No Longer Strangers": friendly church, welcoming and attractive to people looking for a congregation
- growth in church membership
- relates well to minister, associate minister and staff; youth programs
- Coffee Hi has been successful - all ages stay; some stay as long as kitchen is open; have a nice kitchen
- Church looks welcoming - minute you describe church, people know which one you're talking about
- Steve and Elaine bring lots of people in - very lucky to have both
- outreach (prayer list, reaching out to other members in community)
- opportunities for involvement at any level - whatever they want to commit
- reputation: good rep out in the community as a leader
- location: in a spot where a lot of people travel; visible
- decisions made aren't voted so it's a losing decision for some (voted by consensus - it's good for relationships. As much as possible seems this happens through discussion.
- curb appeal
- nurturing - open-mindedness and growth: always learn something
- appreciated by the Native American community and how we welcome them (even though criticized by others)
- all-accepting programs and people
- confirmation: places they've gone, other denominations/churches, soup kitchens. All of this opens their eyes. Friendship of those kids keeps them together - core group keeps them together. Been a lot of places - at least they have the experience (whatever they have is still with them). Come back to the church to see Steve/church
- sermons - when got home from church didn't know what got out of church (in the past). Feel like pastors are speaking to you. Tough to do with all of the academic members, and variety of people. Otherwise, wouldn't go each Sunday. There's always change with the sermons - it's never the same. Steve has been known to change the sermon on the same day of the sermon. How many pastors could do that?
- Friendship in church - have attended a church where people don't say hello. Enjoy talking to USD students who come - this is an opportunity you don't have in all churches.

- Adult Bible study - the leadership is a strength. They take the topic of the sermon and it's amazing what they can get out of it. So few people attend, would be nice to encourage people to attend. Some people feel it's intimidating to go to the class.
- Salon/Mayflower Mondays: Opportunities like that that come up and they change as needed. Brings up different people/leadership to do it.
- Connections to USD/USD students
- gave raises to staff - pretty good financial place
- energetic, educating congregation
- make an attempt to support the wider UCC - it's important that we hear about it.
- way we showcased our community at Mission Fair. Saw overall prospective and bring in missionaries. Liked the way we brought in our community
- Good audio system - everyone can hear (not muffled). John Grayson made the sound system work.
- Figuring out individual strengths of members - people helping people. Talents get employed

2. Where is there room for improvement?

- Confirmation kids - wish we could hang on to them. There is a period in there where we don't see them. Also, don't see a lot of confirmation parents back at church either. Not sure if we don't have programs that interest them. Families could still be members even if they aren't. Pretty normal course of action. Some people that seemingly abandon the church in years past come back around when married and have kids themselves.
- worry we are a church of Steve (feel like we have to consult him with questions and problems). Want to see that we are UCC Vermillion. Worry that when Steve's not there, we will drop to 30 percent membership. However, this isn't an unusual problem. People in outside community see this as well. Will we fall apart? Really don't have participation that we seem to have. Really isn't all about Steve - does go beyond that. You're not on your own. Others could provide interim pastors. Could see us as being a strong church still - sabbatical year proved that.
- Some type of more adult programming. There is a need for women to enjoy one another. Lacking right now. Doesn't need to be formal, but more of a gathering once/twice a year (trip last spring was neat). Adult programming can be just as important. Tough for career people to get away during the day. Trying to get different people together.
- USD students being "adopted" by family - take them home for a meal once and awhile.
- More active adult education that's institutionalized. Get more people active in adult opportunities. However, space makes it hard (don't have a good adult education room). Could try and meet an hour before church and have discussion - problem for people with young children
- Assimilation of new members - how do we get them to do something? Put them on committees right away (they are - put them in the nursery right away)
- People that participate in a lot of programs - how do you reinforce that everyone should give something? Bad business model in some ways.
- Separate collection for kids (they'll feel special - even if it's just a quarter)
- Do a lot of outreach - every community has a lot of needs we're not aware of.

- Need to take care of physical structure. Do a fairly good job of monitoring, but need to keep it up. Hate to see brick and mortar be only need; need to support programs as well. Churches that survive see to endow their building. Endowment funds go to protect the building.
 - Parking lot: needs to be paved; lines painted and come in one way only (westside of the building)
 - air condition the basement - just need the unit for this to become a reality
 - other problems in the basement - is the floor buckling?
- Church attendance - quite a large membership, but attendance is down overall.
 - How do we continue to get each member to be active? Everyone needs to attach to some place. Are there people who don't know how to connect? There has been a shift as to what regular church attendance means.

3. What are our best opportunities for building a stronger Church into the future?

- Change in women's fellowship - in the process of trying to vision itself out of women's fellowship and into something that is more inclusive (theological nurturing for different types of people) Not the old women's fellowship that it used to be -that you had a general meeting and then you had circles. It's a different world now - we have to change with it.
- Food - bring people in. Draw people in and help with people attending.
- Movie night? Done in St. Paul once a month - gets people together
- Put new members on committees as quickly as possible. Want to get them involved and a part of things as quickly as possible. Possibly hire a consultant to look at the church and how well we assimilate new members. We might be understaffed - can't get to every new member the way we should.
- We need to find our niche in the community. Other churches have their niche (Faith Fellowship has the Baby Closet, Trinity Lutheran has the Food Pantry...) What is the UCC's place in the community?
- Challenge members to think what their personal ministry would be (some would be singing, others committee work, others volunteer...). Think the UCC is ready for it - what is your personal ministry?

Barry Vickrey, facilitator

Attendees: Marsha and Craig Thompson, Young Moore, Mary Vickrey

1. What are the Church's current strengths? (Answers are in descending order of frequency.)

Building: looks, functionality, beauty; good physical plant; beautiful sanctuary

Very good with children; LAF popular; intergenerational LAF; children's programs

Minister, leader

Music is strong, excellent

Inclusiveness without pushiness; inclusive denomination; philosophy of openness

Fellowship; Coffee Hi

Good programs

Associate pastor can fill gaps; visits shut-ins, homebound, elderly

Very educated, creative people belong to Church

Sermons; Steve's gift for storytelling

Land for expansion

Ability to fund variety of programs; financially doing reasonably well

Ministers who work together

Plays, community theatre

Tie-in to University

Steve's USD classes as outreach to students

Adult Bible study class

Members' involvement in Vermillion activities

Church is handicapped accessible

SESDAC clients in worship

Discussion: (1) Because of LAF, there are many more young adults with a connection to the Church. How do we involve them more? (2) Does the Church have an identity separate from Steve Miller? Is he overextended?

2. Where is there room for improvement?

What should we do with building and recently purchased land (expanded campus)? Could do building addition for 24/7 programs. Need building where you can do more than just sanctuary allows. Need architect, engineer.

Choir needs new music, more contemporary music, more variety.

Church needs presence in community through something like Welcome Table or Food Pantry.

More structure and education for volunteer programs.

Developing visitors into members.

Cut budget for operating facilities and use savings for programs.

Create small groups as needed.

Involve younger adult generation, fill generation gaps, avoid cliques (Church could be warmer).

How to meet new people? How to reach out to others?

Made decision to buy house and property on assumption that house would be torn down, but then allowed it to be moved and now an eyesore.

Website with blogs; ways to communicate about ordinary things.

More opportunities for creative people.

More potlucks.

Pave parking lot.

Chairs for choir loft.

Chairs for Mayflower Room.

Applauding for everything now; affects worship atmosphere negatively.

Trust fund is insufficient.

Provide more support for own needy families before branching out; start first within Church.

3. What are our best opportunities for building a stronger Church into the future?

Building addition with Sunday School rooms, everything on one level; sanctuary is probably big enough; need space for ancillary functions; don't have enough room for programs.

Strong influence of younger adults/families.

Develop mission program, such as tutoring or Habitat for Humanity.

Utilize Steve's influence, popularity to Church's advantage.

Researching and learning more about what other UCC (and other) churches are doing.

Need a process for how to do great ideas.

We have a trust fund; need to promote estate planning to benefit Church one Sunday in spring.

Potlucks.

Educated congregation; we can do anything.

Use kids as springboard.

Use wisdom, experience of older members.

Develop interest groups, small groups.

Strengthen ties to Indian community; develop ties to specific reservations.

Add drama group.

Develop Facebook presence.

Discussion: How do we get younger people more involved? Ask them. Have people who are involved talk about what they like. How many come out of an unchurched background? What about having greeters? Are younger people interested in associating with other generations?