

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF CARBONDALE

A RICH TRADITION, A BRIGHT FUTURE

**A REPORT OF THE MINISTRY ASSESSMENT
AND PLANNING PROCESS (MAPP) STEERING COMMITTEE**

June, 2010

Introduction

Founded in 1853, First United Methodist Church of Carbondale (FUMC) is not only a church with a rich history as a part of downtown Carbondale, but it is also a church with a rich present, and an excited and energized congregation. FUMC is a warm and welcoming church with a heart for mission and a deep desire to reach out and touch other person's lives with the love of Christ. In the congregation, there are countless persons who are involved in the community in a variety of ways. They're meeting human needs, they are attempting to address social problems that all communities face, they are reaching out to the University community, and they are always looking for new ways to mission, both in Carbondale and around the world.

The congregation of FUMC is also committed to excellence in worship and in music. There is a general attitude that music and worship are vital for making disciples of Jesus Christ. The result is a worship experience that celebrates the richness of fellowship with one another, as well as connecting persons with God in a manner that is uplifting, life changing, and hope filled.

Opportunities for worship, witness, service to others, and fellowship are what gives life meaning and purpose at FUMC. Our mission is clear. We are:

"Called together by the Holy Spirit, we proclaim God's presence and love in the world through prayer, worship, education, and service. We invite children, youth, and adults to become disciples of Jesus Christ, live fully in the Holy Spirit, and embrace God's love."

Our purposes are guided by the word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit as we seek to:

- Live out the commitment "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors" by welcoming all persons to come and be a part of our church family;
- Serve our local community and the world through spiritual and social outreach. We will be "his hand reaching out to the oppressed" so that others may know Jesus Christ and be blessed;
- Worship in a spiritual manner that is both traditional and creative with high quality and theologically-based music, preaching and teaching;
- Partner with diverse churches and organizations in our local area to extend our outreach; and,

- Understand and respond to the continuous changes and needs in society.

We are blessed with the opportunity to serve our church in one or more of several important ministries including Youth, Congregational Care, Teaching, Older Adult, Health, Stephen Ministries, Music, Families in Progress, Singles, Women's, and Southern Hospitality (short-term hosting of church, campus and community visitors).

In short, we are blessed to have a church and congregation that is dedicated to proclaiming and reaching out to each other and the world with God's love.

Purpose of the Ministry Assessment and Planning Process (MAPP)

Believing in the old adage, "unless things change, they remain the same" in the Fall of 2009 the FUMC Church Council wisely initiated a process to help the congregation set long-term priorities for its future. From the outset, the process was clearly focused on building on the rich tradition of FUMC while at the same time charting a course for incremental improvements in our future.

A MAPP Steering Committee composed of members of the congregation worked with representatives of Congregational Development of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. The process was designed to build on the work of the congregation in the past year in listening sessions conducted by Rev. Rhein as the new Pastor of the congregation, a survey conducted of the congregation on two consecutive Sundays in January 2010 to measure FUMC's current health and effectiveness, and a demographic analysis of the Carbondale area.

After the initial assessment, the MAPP process included intensive Discernment Bible Study conducted from mid-March through April. Approximately 40% of the average worship attendance participated in the Bible studies. Summaries of each group discussion identified common themes and were used as starting points for the MAPP Steering Committee's discussions and discernment during a Vision Retreat held on April 30-May 1. The Vision Retreat was intended to identify the strengths and challenges faced by FUMC and make recommendations for consideration by the FUMC Church Council.

Through all of this, the MAPP Steering Committee stayed clearly focused on how to make an exciting and dynamic church even better, recognizing that it is as important to understand our strengths as it is to understand our challenges.

Current Assessment

Four sources of information were used by the MAPP Steering Committee in the Vision Retreat. These included information from “Meet the Pastor” gatherings conducted by Rev. Rhein as the new Pastor of the congregation in late fall of 2009, a congregational survey, demographic data about the Carbondale community and surrounding area, and group summaries from the Discernment Bible Study. Important information was learned by the Steering Committee from each of these sources.

“Meet the Pastor” Sessions

Twenty-five “Meet the Pastor” gatherings were held, allowing the opportunity both for people to become acquainted with Rev. Rhein and for the Pastor to gain a better understanding of the congregation. In these gatherings, Rev. Rhein asked four questions. They served as the framework for the sessions as follows:

- Name something that this church does really well.
- What is the biggest challenge, issue, or opportunity that you see in the next 12 – 18 months?
- If you could see a “mid-sized” miracle performed for this church, what would it be?
- In what ways has this church strengthened your spiritual life?

A summary of the responses to these questions was of particular help to the Steering Committee in identifying what we do well and the challenges we face. The most frequent responses received were as follows:

1. Name something that this church does really well.
 - Excellent music program (noted in every session)
 - Community involvement and outreach
 - Church missions work
 - Congregational care and fellowship
 - Friendly (welcoming) congregation
 - Variety of Sunday school classes and small groups
 - Clergy and staff

2. What is the biggest challenge, or issue, or opportunity that you see in the next 12 – 18 months?
 - Attract and expand youth programs
 - Examine, and where necessary, increase the staffing of FUMC
 - Attract young families
 - Increase membership
 - Fully utilize technology for communication

3. If you could see a “mid-sized” miracle performed for this church, what would it be?
 - Attract more youth
 - Expand marketing for new members, particularly young families
 - Develop a solid financial debt-reduction strategy
 - Examine and expand staffing
 - Examine possibilities for a contemporary alternative service to attract youth

4. In what ways has this church strengthened your spiritual life?
 - Outstanding music program
 - A caring congregation that strives to have a relationship with Christ
 - Sunday school classes and small groups
 - Sermons

Congregational Survey

Two hundred seventy-four individuals completed the congregational survey in January, 2010. Sixty-six percent of those responding to the survey were over the age of 55. Most of the respondents come from UMC backgrounds, have been members of FUMC for more than twenty years, attend very regularly, and are satisfied in their faith.

The age groups in the congregation are not equally represented. About 43% of the congregation is 65 years of age or older. The ages of congregation members and data from the “Meet the Pastor” sessions clearly speak to the important need to attract and expand youth programs and place a particular focus on serving young families. Our attendance on a typical Sunday ranges from 300 – 350. While attendance is down by about 10 – 15%, 40 new members have joined the church in the last three years.

While active involvement in the church varies among those surveyed, more than 50% of the congregation believe that we have a clear mission, we are extravagantly generous, we believe in intentional faith development, we are pleased with our ability to participate in passionate worship, and we are interested in mission and service outreach. According to the survey, challenges of importance relate to the need for the congregation to reach out to the unchurched of the community, to increase participation in activities by members who self-identified little or no involvement in FUMC, and the need to develop and implement a plan for developing new and strengthening existing leaders in the church.

Demographic Data

A demographic study area was defined that included the large area surrounding Carbondale that FUMC could reasonably be expected to reach. It has a population of more than 32,000 people that is projected to continue to decline slightly over the next five years. In the area, two groups that are growing in numbers include the *singles and young families* (ages 25 – 34) and the *before formal schooling* (age 0 – 4) age group.

The area surrounding FUMC can best be characterized by three different groups, including:

- Young, single, and college-educated households and students living in and around college-oriented communities
- Relatively young high school educated couples and single households living in older houses and earning lower-middle class incomes
- Highly-mobile, multi-ethnic, singles, single parents, and unmarried couples

A further challenge is clear with the information that 52.3% of the people in the area consider themselves to be a spiritual person, yet only 18.5% feel that it is important to attend religious services, and only 16.3% indicate that their faith is really important to them.

While there is a tremendous opportunity to reach the large, growing population of singles and young families, there is also a great opportunity to reach children and youth. Data suggest that 80 – 85% of the people who come to Christ do so by age 16. Data also suggest that 80% of those will drift away from church by the time they reach age 23. FUMC has a tremendous opportunity to reach out to children and youth for Christ, and an equal challenge to remain relevant in their young adult lives.

Discernment Bible Study

More than 40% of the congregation participated in the six-week small group Discernment Bible Studies. We are very pleased to note that many of these groups are still meeting and summaries of the themes from the respective groups suggest the interest of the congregation in small group spiritual growth.

While it is not possible to summarize each of the six Discernment Bible Study sessions, the responses to Lesson 6 are very consistent with information learned in the “Meet the Pastor” gatherings. A summary of top actions recommended by all of the groups in Lesson 6 included:

- Hiring an Associate Pastor/Spiritual Leader for youth, young families, and congregational care
- Improving/training/expanding welcoming rituals/opportunities
- Organizing more small groups for study/fellowship/spiritual growth and support
- Improving communications with technology
- Improving publicity of all of FUMC’s activities
- Completing renovation/Phase II of the building program to offer better facilities for youth and music programs

Strengths of FUMC

We should celebrate our strengths. From all of the data, discussions, participation by members of the congregation, and from everything the Steering Committee knows and feels about the church, we should be proud as a congregation to have the opportunity to worship, witness, provide service to others, and fellowship with one another.

We should be proud of our excellent music program, our dedication to community involvement and outreach, our missions work, our interest in congregational care and fellowship, our clergy and staff and our dedication to living out the commitment of “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.”

Opportunities for FUMC

We have a bright future and opportunities as a congregation to build upon the rich tradition at FUMC. These opportunities were consistently identified in the “Meet the Pastor” gatherings and the summaries from the Discernment Bible Study. They include 1) a focus on attracting and

expanding programs for youth and young families, 2) increasing the staffing compliment of FUMC, 3) increasing membership, fellowship and opportunities for small group spiritual growth, and 4) addressing basic organizational issues to help us grow as a congregation. These four opportunities were used by the Steering Committee to craft our recommendations.

Church Identity

In the Vision Retreat, the MAPP Steering Committee thoughtfully and prayerfully took all of the information from the “Meet the Pastor” sessions, the congregational survey, the demographic data about Carbondale and its surrounding communities, and especially the summaries of the Discernment Bible Study groups, to reflect on our core values, mission statement, and our vision for the future. As a group, we believe the congregation’s core values are focused on:

- Centrality of Christ in Biblical teachings
- Prayer
- Worship and music
- Compassionate service and outreach
- Openness
- Loving relationships

The Steering Committee reaffirmed the existing Mission Statement of FUMC as follows:

“Called together by the Holy Spirit, we proclaim God’s presence and love in the world through prayer, worship, education, and service. We invite children, youth, and adults to become disciples of Jesus Christ, live fully in the Holy Spirit, and embrace God’s love.”

The Steering Committee also used all of the information described herein to craft a vision for our future.

As a starting point for consideration by the Church Council, we have crafted n a vision statement as follows:

“First United Methodist Church of Carbondale is a welcoming, friendly, nurturing church with a growing and engaged Christian family of all ages. We are focused on worship, discipleship, spiritual growth, outreach, congregational relationships and care.”

The words in the vision statement are important. We believe FUMC should continue its tradition of being a welcoming, friendly, and nurturing church. We should also be seen as a

growing and engaged church supporting Christian families across all age ranges. We also believe that we should keep a clear and focused vision on important parts of our church including worship, discipleship, spiritual growth, outreach, congregational relationships and care.

We recommend that the Church Council form an ad hoc committee to meet with representatives from the MAPP Steering Committee to discuss further the core values and vision statement crafted in the Vision Retreat.

Top Ministry Priorities and Recommendations

Four priorities (and suggestions for action) have been identified by the MAPP Steering Committee for consideration. It is important that their consideration be integrated into the regular governance structure of the church, the FUMC Church Council.

Whether through an ongoing committee of the Church Council or a new one, it is the Church Council that can best work within the existing structure of the church to address the priorities. Four members of the MAPP Steering Committee have been identified as “champions” for each of the top four priorities to assist in deliberations as the congregation moves forward. The four ministry priorities are as follows:

1. FUMC should develop a focused, effective ministry with families, children, youth, and young adults (John Hinde, Champion)

One of the most active groups in the Discernment Bible Study was Families in Progress. New and exciting things are happening with this group. We recommend that the Church Council consider the need for an Associate Pastor who is focused on implementing new programs and services to engage youth and to serve and attract young families. This may also include forming a family ministries advisory council, and establishing a new lay position to coordinate with current lay leaders the involvement of junior and senior high school youth in church ministries.

2. FUMC should increase its focus on reaching out to the unchurched, congregational care, and opportunities for fellowship (Joyce Vancil, Champion)

Recommendations here include expanding the use of technology and other marketing tools to attract greater numbers of families, children, youth, and young adults to embrace God’s love at FUMC. They also include initiating new church-wide fellowship

activities, involving new church members in worship leadership, increasing the number of first-time households attending worship, recruiting and training members to serve as mentors to new and prospective members, recruiting and training members to serve as ambassadors to inactive members, working closely with calling team members to make contact with first-time visitors, and continuing to expand efforts to focus on providing congregational care to members in need of personal and spiritual support.

3. FUMC should increase spiritual growth through small group participation (Nancy Keenan, Champion)

We recommend that the Church Council consider establishing a committee responsible for the ongoing small group spiritual growth of the congregation in areas such as Bible studies, book clubs, prayer groups, etc. A sizeable number of the congregation participating in the Discernment Bible Study sessions and small group studies that preceded them, suggests the important need to provide expanded opportunity to participate in groups focused on spiritual growth.

4. We should address organizational issues that may affect our ability to grow as a church (John Washburn, Champion)

The Steering Committee recommends that efforts be made by the Church Council to involve new people in serving in ministry leadership, consider the need for a part-time information technology staff person to assist in utilizing social networking as a means of communication and collecting email addresses, producing a church directory, and assisting in marketing efforts associated with attracting new members to the FUMC congregation. The Steering Committee also recommends the need for the Church Council to develop a long-range plan for church finance, debt reduction, and fiscal priorities important to the church's long-term future.

The Champions of each priority are responsible for becoming the cheerleader for that priority and look forward to the opportunity to work with the Church Council as it considers each of these priorities and suggestions for future actions. Certainly, other members of the congregation will have unique and creative ways for us to collectively focus our time and talent to address these important priorities.

Summary

The MAPP Steering Committee wants to take this opportunity to thank the Church Council and congregation for the opportunity to address the long-term future of FUMC. The title of this report (A Rich Tradition, A Bright Future) was not chosen by happenstance. We do have a rich tradition. For more than 150 years, FUMC has been recognized as a church with a rich history, with a heart for mission, and a deep desire to reach out and touch other persons' lives with the love of Christ. We are first and foremost a warm, welcoming, and energized congregation. Our disciples of Christ live fully in the Holy Spirit, and embrace God's love.

We also have a bright future. We have a wonderful opportunity for making incremental changes in the nature of what we do and how we do it. God's vision for the ministry of our church and our community is truly as unique and special as we are unique and special in his eyes. We can truly use all of our time, talents, gifts, and presence for the growth of FUMC in God's kingdom.