

NEW BEGINNINGS FACILITATOR'S REPORT

April 17 – May 26, 2016

BACKGROUND

In August 2015, the Church Council of Pilgrim Church committed to the “New Beginnings” assessment process. In February 2016, a draft assessment prepared by the Rev. Dr. Douglas Pfeiffer (Appendix A) was provided to Pilgrim. The assessment was then used in a facilitated six week process in which the congregation met in 7 small groups to discern a clear direction (“bold decision”) for Pilgrim’s future. 13 facilitators were trained to lead the small groups using the formatted discussion sessions provided by New Beginnings. A total of 85 Pilgrims (34% of total membership, 82% of weekly worship attendance) participated in the six week process from April 17 to May 26, 2016. This report is a summary of the facilitators’ findings.

BOLD DECISION

The groups were unanimous in their decision to “Redefine Pilgrim’s Mission”. Redefinition is a way of saying it is time to enter a new season based upon God’s mission for this church, its congregants and the community that surrounds us locally, regionally and globally.

Redefinition will not be easy as it calls for hard choices that may break with certain structural and programmatic ways of “doing church”. It is moving on a continuum from a membership (consumer-oriented) model to more of a missional (community-oriented) model. It seeks an energizing balance of the inward and outward journeys, a nurturing discipleship that feeds initiatives of service.

Interesting Quotes related to mission

- We inspire our members to learn, discover, and grow through a radically inclusive faith community
- Wings in the Air or Birkenstocks on the Ground – Doers more than just money suppliers
- Build a front porch with rockers rather than a fenced in backyard with grills
- We start this journey without a rich history of achievement in some key areas relative to the “missional church”; we do have a rich history in certain areas (e.g., music, culture, community service).

Highlights from Small Groups on Redefinition (in no particular order):

- Redefine mission clearly (e.g., Social Justice Church)
 - What is Pilgrim synonymous with? Do we need a name change?
- Better understand what is involved in relocation (e.g., costs, selling, location, community impacts/benefits)
- Go for it and stop worrying about money
 - Long term process - Need to keep energy levels steady and sustainable
 - Use endowment for outside missions
- Share our building with another church or non-profit
- Fill gaps in areas of discipleship, spiritual development (adult and youth), make way for teens as well
- Make changes inclusive of low income, GLBT, neighborhood
- Explore options related to parallel start or adoption strategies
 - Explore faith communities in crisis to share the building or join Pilgrim
 - Keep some the same, but start new ministry for others with different needs
 - Don't call a minister for another year/thrive only ministry

THEMES AND KEY POINTS

Key points were identified from the small groups and from there they were combined into themes. These themes and key points are not intended to address every brainstorm from all the groups, but rather the ideas that rose up time and again during all of the small group discussions. The ideas are only meant to help the congregation formulate our mission's work both in the short and long term as a series of next steps. These steps will then need to be evaluated for successful ministries that serve God's intention for the next generation of a new Pilgrim.

Passion – Best At – Resources

In the New Beginnings process, the groups discussed three areas of organizational life: Passion and Energy, Best At, and Resource Engine. Passion and Energy are the areas where they saw excitement at Pilgrim. Best At is the particular niche that sets us apart in the community. Resource Engine are the resources that make it possible to do what we find we are both passionate about and best at (building, finances, skills of individuals, etc.). Below are a few key points:

- It was difficult to quantify the difference in strength for these three areas (Passion, Best At, Resources) between all the groups
- Pilgrim spends much more money on the building than most participants realized

- Pilgrim spends less on spiritual development and social justice
- Passion does not equal energy in some of the members interpretation

Community

Our community generally consists of a mixture of young families, thriving middle to upper class, college students and singles, retirees and seniors. Of this mix the young families are a growing population at Pilgrim and the college students and singles are barely represented. Below are a few key points:

- Pilgrim is good at acceptance, support of and for diversity, social justice issues, and programming for children
- Pilgrim represents the community in all but college students and singles
- Invest time and resources to better understand the neighborhood
- Explore ministry needs – we don't know what they are
 - Trouble seeing a need or desire to align with our neighborhood/community as a missional church rather than providing for some individual missions
 - Work with campus ministry to reach out to college students

Pilgrim's in-house life needs

- Support network, connecting with others in own life stage or beyond, provide for each other
- Adult Spiritual Growth
 - Formalize a spiritual development program
 - Grow and build on our passions
 - Hope, belonging, grounding, recharge batteries
 - Intellectual discussions
- Enhance Youth development/programming
- Find opportunities to organize and define individual gifts to help fulfill ministry programs identified in redefinition work
- Increase/Enhance Intergenerational opportunities
- Provide environmental/outdoor opportunities

Toward a Missional Church

- Do fewer things better
- Open and Affirming
 - While we are open and affirming, we haven't been intentional in our support
- Kids (children, youth, teens)

- Larger ministry role
- Increase coordination between children’s education and Rachael’s work; make success of children’s programming independent of one person
- College Students
 - Build programs that will attract their interest and energy
 - Increase presence on campus
- Seniors
 - Explore needs(e.g., loss of spouse, transportation, programs to them)
- Music moves the spirit
 - Explore ways to invite others to learn, play and perform music for themselves and others
 - Expand what we have; move it into the community
- Worship Adaptation (e.g. change or add to style to meet larger community needs)
- Social Justice is a mission
 - Pilgrim is known as a counter-cultural community
 - We give from our faith community into mission (e.g., CHUM, OCWM, local initiatives)
- Welcoming – we currently do this well

Resources

Pilgrim’s building requires a great deal of financial resources to maintain, and yet, when congregants speak of the physical attributes of the building such as sense of place, lighting, sound, etc., it is difficult to imagine going elsewhere. Below are a few key points:

- The building is an asset and part of Pilgrim’s mission to this community
 - Clarify what the building means as a mission
- Define the building’s mission and explore how the building benefits or impacts that mission both in dollars and a sense of place
- Redefine membership so it doesn’t inhibit non-members to service/mission
- Provide meaningful membership with expectations

Organization Management

Although all organizations need some form of structure for discernment, planning and decision-making, Pilgrim has begun and needs to continue to move toward a less cumbersome structure that provides for an easier and effective way for people to serve toward the mission physically, organizationally, and financially that makes a difference in our community and to our personal spiritual growth. Below are some key points:

- Leadership
 - Communication is a barrier – need to listen and communicate direction better
 - Guide and train leaders, a successional process – e.g., 1) Members, nonmember join team(s), builds passion, provides resources; 2) Move to a committee to help guide programs through teams; 3) Bring gifts by serving as a council member to help with overall planning and structure)
- Taking action – task oriented
 - Clear purpose and product
 - A volunteer organizer – make personal calls
- Social Justice needs redefining both within the church structure of committees and teams
- Attitudes
 - Being intentional: stating clearly what goals are and working towards them
 - Not afraid, but ready
 - Concerned, but optimistic
- On Public Relations and Outreach
 - Inform on the history of UCC/Congregationalist mission (e.g., abolitionists, educators, O & A, changers)
 - Go to them with ministry/programs (colleges ministries, seniors)
 - PACT, On-line media, Congdon newsletter
 - Pilgrims’ entrances for those who enter the building for other purposes
 - Make personal call or invitation to serve on a program, etc.

FACILITATOR’S OBSERVATIONS

Group A – Facilitator: Denny Falk with assistance from Mary Anderson

Participants: Mary Anderson, Karl Beaster, Sarah Beaster, Dana Lindaman, Elise Lindaman, Andy Nielsen, Willie Schuldt, Nyasha Spears, Nate Stumme, Rebekka Stumme, Steve Therrien

The group became closer; many members did not know each other previously, but shared personal thoughts and feelings that were actively accepted by other members. Group members felt increasingly more comfortable sharing with one another. The group became more engaged and energetic as the sessions proceeded and came to agree that mission redefinition that included enhanced Christian education and spiritual development.

Group B – Facilitators: Cindy Grindy and Steve Grindy

Participants: Jenny Ballew, Laura Delaney-Pence, Deb DeVaney, Bret Pence, Annalisa Peterson, Peter Peterson, Jack Setterlund, Joan Setterlund, Pete Willemsen, Renee Willemsen, David Braun

We want Pilgrim to be seen as a light shining in the neighborhood and we want it to be an LED. The light comes from finding God's will for our church and the LED represents using our resources wisely and intentionally.

Our group had many energetic and passionate discussions about the opportunities for growth in our Church. Weaknesses identified by the assessment were seen as opportunities for the church to be intentional about planning our future and using our financial resources wisely. Our group sees the value in being a mission driven church. The first priorities are spiritual development and reaching out into the neighborhood.

The participants all expressed appreciation for the chance to work together, to get to know each other better and to work towards making a deliberate plan for our church. Participants feel good about knowing that the church is serious about becoming sustainable and a church driven by the will of God.

Group C – Facilitators: Kane Tewes and Char Taylor

Participants: Serenity Campbell, Zach Campbell, Aaron Crowell, Sarah Crowell, Ruth Ann Eaton, Tammy Hensley, Meghan Huot, Patrick Huot, Jonathan Kresha

Our group had a very positive and open attitude. Members of the group became more comfortable with each other and shared thoughts and experiences. The last session was a little more subdued. While the discussion was good, there were some undertones of uncertainty of the next steps.

Group D – Facilitators: Diane Desotelle and Andrew Streit

Participants: Mary Olin, Ben Olson, Melanie and Martin Grune, Julie and Jim Drake, Kitty Van Evera, Jane Killough

Our group was a mixture of church members with 5, 15 and 50 years plus as members. When we started the New Beginnings process there was some concern that we'd tried this before, but there was a willingness by everyone to give the process a chance.

Most group members not only showed up every Monday, but they came prepared to talk about the readings. Everyone remain engaged throughout the six weeks, with energy building toward the end.

The biggest change we noticed was the growing awareness how much we enjoyed each other's company, not having the chance before this to talk much, but further, enjoying the chance to work together with people we valued on such an important issue. We concluded our work with the idea that Pilgrim was worth preserving and fighting for, even if we weren't sure yet what our new mission might be.

Group E – Facilitators: Jean Walters and Paul Antwerp

Participants: Mary Kay Chavez, Tea Chavez, Steve Cushing, John Gould, Mary Jo Gould, Ted Harwood, Nan Hillmeyer, Josie Olson

Group E, whose 10 participants range in age from about 30 to about 70 and included both members and friends of Pilgrim, held its meetings Tuesday evenings at the home of Mary Kay and Tea Chavez. Conversations were often both/and; our mission is both to our members and to our neighbors. We talked about Pilgrim having many resources, especially human. Overall, we felt that the best focus for our energy is Mission Redefinition, clarifying what our mission actually is.

Group F – Facilitators: Dave Zentner and Carol Bacig

Participants: Anita and Harlan Stech, Jane and Gene Shull, Cindy and John Fochs, Bob Reichert, Carri Hoagland, Mardi Bagley, and Margo Zentner

Group F was primarily composed of older and long term members (75%), who were initially comfortable with Pilgrim as it now exists.

As the group progressed through New Beginnings, they discovered the passion they had for Pilgrim ran strong and deep. And from that passion they moved ahead to a willingness to explore new possibilities. Ideas flowed and all joined in the discussions. They discovered strengths and interests in each other they had not known before.

While they agreed to pursue a new direction, their desire remained firm not to lose those things that Pilgrim currently does so well.

Group G – Facilitators: Clyde Johnson and Julie Johnson

Participants: Don and Paula Bjoralt, Lurene Buhrmann, Len Edwards, Jackie Falk, Marge Fraser, Triss Harwood, John Jensen, Rachael Kresha, Joan Morrison, Joan Semenchuk, Kay Slack, Gail Trowbridge

Group G represented 15 committed Pilgrim members. Respect for one another's opinions was inherent from the beginning. Common goals for Pilgrim's future as well as comfort when praying together were highlights of our work together.