

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

MINUTES OF 1ST MEETING, JULY 19, 2010

Dr. Henderson called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm and offered a prayer to guide our deliberations.

Background: Dr. Henderson called this group together not because of the financial issues facing the church but because he felt the need for us to reflect on the church's past, present and future as he enters the mid point of his fourth year and the beginning of another year at FUMC. He thought we should be of common mind and heart as we move forward.

Factual Information: To guide the discussion, Dr. Henderson repeated data he had previously shared, the gist of which was that FUMC is in a turnaround phase from a long period of decline of membership and worship attendance but that the growth we have been experiencing since 2007 is not statistically significant and should not give us confidence that we are strongly in a growth mode. He pointed out that our membership was 529 in 2007; we have gained 125 new members but have lost 74 members (59 by death), for a net increase of 51. Our membership as of now is 580.

Dr. Henderson further pointed out that we want to consider growth not just numerically but also in the quality of our spiritual life as a church and as individual disciples.

He firmly believes that growth of the church, both spiritually and numerically, is essential to our survival. We cannot survive unless we grow.

Individual Introductions and Answers to the Question – What is now different about FUMC compared to the past?

All of the people present introduced themselves, with reference to the committee they chaired or role they played and the length of their FUMC membership, the purpose being to elicit ideas for discussion of the future.

Lay Leader, Dan Greathouse: the church has more youth than previously.

Long-time member, Tom Young: yes, we have more youth but we also have lost some large donor members.

Mission & Outreach Team Leader, Peggy Halsey: grew up here but has only been back 18 months, too short to see differences.

Children's Ministry Committee Chair, Joanie Thompson: excited about the children's ministry under Jill Wagstaff's leadership.

Stewardship Committee Chair and young adult representative, Eric Burcham: the church is not growing fast enough.

Finance Committee Chair, Jeff Cheek: there is an attitude in the church that there's something we need to do.

Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair, Tim Leslie: everyone is very nice, welcoming and nonjudgmental. He likes the traditional service.

Treasurer, Sarah Daly: she senses revitalization, a more joyful experience. The music is great. On the negative side, we have done a poor job of budgeting, so we're in a lot of trouble now. She doesn't know a lot of people in church, and doesn't see a lot of young people.

[Dr. Henderson comments that we need young people if we are to grow.]

Sarah continues that we need another Nathan Carden, our youth pastor who was himself young, dynamic and able to attract young adults among others. She also said we need to focus more on children.

Altar Guild Co-Chair, Joanne Young: we need more young people. We should emphasize our traditional offerings and stay within the budget.

Trustees Chair, Leon Couch: accomplishments under Master's Plan I and Nathan Carden's ministry. We need to work on attracting younger people.

United Methodist Men President, Larry Shaw: the traditional service attracts him. The homeless ministry is important, but devoting a full-time pastor to this ministry is excessive.

Long-time member, Doug Thompson: has a more macro view – likes the feel here. Thinks we have used our downtown location as an excuse. The senior pastor sets the tone for the church and fills the sanctuary. Thinks Dr. Henderson is phenomenal. Historically, FUMC has been a stepchild of the Conference; we get ministers too near retirement. Dr. Henderson's replacement will have a very significant impact on the history of this church.

He thinks we have a wonderful sanctuary and music program.

He points out that all churches except the Evangelicals are in decline. We need to "reload" and decide what we want to be. Most don't want us to grow into a mega church, but we need money to grow and support our vision.

Finance Committee and Council Member, Audrey Lewis: likes Dr. Henderson's sermons, which are historically grounded and well researched, and the worship service. She sees a huge change in tenor. But, she also sees top down decision making. She'd like a survey of all the worshippers to see what they want.

Usher Ministry Coordinator, David Watson: agrees with thoughts previously expressed. He doesn't think the Children's Church has been given the attention it needs. He's happy with Jill Wagstaff's new leadership. He points out that young adults don't equal families with young children. The latter need more attention as well.

Christian Education Ministry Team Leader, Jim Knight: doesn't disagree with anything said so far. He sees the church as more positive and less tense than in the past. There are no "camps" dividing us. He urges tapping into the new members for leadership positions.

Church Council Chair, Mary Kilgour: she feels a more exciting spirituality in Dr. Henderson's Sunday services and in the Wednesday night classes but also a tension arising from current budget problems. Fortunately, there also seems to be a willingness to work together to resolve issues.

Altar Guild Ministry Co-Coordinator, Colene Cone: the church's previous senior pastors have been challenges. She thinks Dr. Henderson is excellent. The music is great. We need more commitment to youth and children and should commit pastors' efforts to youth and children rather than to the homeless. Thinks we use our downtown location as an excuse. We should make the nursery stronger, have Sunday School classes specifically for children and young adults and should have programs aimed at young married couples, such as parenting classes and budgeting classes.

Summing Up: Dr. Henderson summed up by saying we wouldn't resolve things in this meeting, but some issues can go back to committees for decisions. He also pointed out that some concerns are already being addressed. The choice of Jill and Rachael, for example, hired to split the portfolio of children and youth was the idea of the Youth Council and the Children's Ministry Committee. We can expect significant developments in those two ministries.

The young adult ministry needs more attention. But leadership can come from within that group. It does not need a staff appointment to make it happen. Wes and Sarah Emmanuel (with the active support of others) are taking the lead to make this a more active ministry.

Dr. Henderson then related four main drivers for church revitalization, quoted from a preliminary report of the General Conference's 2008 Roundtable on church revitalization:

1. Either traditional and contemporary worship, done well,
2. Small groups, including for children and youth,
3. Inspirational preaching and length of pastoral appointments. (He pointed out that FUMC has seldom had appointments longer than 4 years and never longer than 6 years, and
4. Strong lay leadership.

The issue of Dr. Henderson's replacement is something for the church to focus on now. The way the Florida Conference has approached staffing of this church has been unfortunate. The job is very stressful. Not everyone has the skill to be a spiritual leader and the chief executive officer of a diverse congregation such as ours. It is understandable why all but three in the last 50 years have lasted no longer than four years. The Conference needs to see staffing FUMC in a more strategic way than it has so far. We need to convince key people that this is a

strategically important church, that we can grow if we have a dynamic, energetic leader to guide us.

Jim Knight pointed out that he has had opportunities to work at the Conference level and has seen that the Conference sees FUMC as problematic, a church that is “trouble.” He feels, however, that Dr. Henderson has turned that impression around.

Several people chimed in that FUMC has had a reputation as difficult in the Conference.

It was agreed to table this issue for now because Dr. Henderson has no plans to leave FUMC. At some point we might need a small group to work on this issue with key members of the Conference. Jim Knight would be a good person for such a small group because of his past experiences at a Conference level. Dr. Henderson will talk with the District Superintendent before deciding on the small group.

Tom Young brought up the issue of the short-term financial crisis that brought us here. It needs resolution. He thought Dr. Henderson was in the best position to recommend changes to the budget and actions we should take as a result. Do we still need a long-term plan?

Dr. Henderson replied that we do need a long-term plan but issues need to be and are being dealt with by the relevant committees – Staff Parish, Finance, Trustees and the Church Council. We also need another Roundtable discussion.

Jeff Cheek made several points:

- The drop-off of donations in June led to our cash flow crisis. To address it, we tapped into the housing fund and agreed with Trustees to cover our deficit through September from undesignated funds under Trustees’ control.
- He said the earlier point made that younger members weren’t supporting the church as much as older members who were dying wasn’t proven by statistics: receipts have grown by 40% in ten years (not factoring in inflation). However, lots of our problem stem from the economy’s downturn. Our short-term plan has been to request a step up in pledging. In fact, we are not too far off meeting our current budget for the year.
- But, we need to look at how we raise money and how we allocate it. He pointed out that 25% of money coming to FUMC goes to designated funds. This may be because of our efforts to target giving. But, in turn, it reduces our flexibility.
- We need a unified financial strategy.

Leon Couch said we were using the Laura Carmichael bequest, which was undesignated, to fund the deficit; this was not a loan, per the Trustees’ motion to approve. (However, an earlier \$20,000 provided to the budget was regarded as a loan.)

In closing, Dr. Henderson agreed we have a serious financial issue, but it does not come from overspending. It comes from under earning. We should not let these real concerns quench our spirit and enthusiasm for what we are doing.

The second session of the Leadership Roundtable was set for Monday, August 9 at 6:30 pm.

Key Points to Emerge from Roundtable 1 Meeting:

- 1. More pastoral support for children and youth, less for homeless ministry.**
- 2. More support generally for children, youth, young adults and young married couples all of whom are seen as essential for church growth.**
- 3. Senior pastor who follows Dr. Henderson should be young and dynamic rather than approaching retirement.**
- 4. Members present were happy with the traditional services and music program now in place at FUMC.**
- 5. We need a unified financial strategy that includes funds from all sources.**