



YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

*First United Methodist Church
St. Petersburg, Florida*

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BACKGROUND

First United Methodist Church is a rare find – a rapidly growing downtown church. This church has deep roots in St. Petersburg, reaching back to 1887. The current red brick sanctuary was built in the 1920s with beautiful stained glass windows. It is ideally situated in a revitalized downtown with popular restaurants, theaters and the waterfront just a few blocks away.

It is a theologically diverse community of faith that has a longstanding reputation as a church that cares about families. Church members describe their church as “friendly,” “evolving,” and “vocal about our opinions.”

Senior Pastor David Miller was appointed to the church in 2007 and is known for his engaging preaching. He is leading the church into a new “Pillar” structure that emphasizes diffused decision-making and empowering congregation members to pursue ministry opportunities. The church has grown nearly 50% in the past four years, from 495 worshipping in 2007 to 735 in 2011. The church also has an associate pastor, Dawn Worden, who joined the church in June this year.

The membership of the church is around 1,700 and on an average week, 735 people attend one of the church’s three worship services: a blended service at 8:00, a contemporary service at 9:30, and a traditional service at 11:00.

A cadre of committed volunteers currently leads the youth ministry while the church seeks its next youth director. There are approximately 210 6th through 12th graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, about 47 of them participate in some aspect of church life, from Sunday school to Sunday night youth group, and Sunday morning worship to Wednesday night Bible Study. Most of those students will attend more than one activity per week.

The church has a 2011 budget of \$2.6 million. For the year 2011, the youth ministry has a budget in the neighborhood of \$84,000 including the program budget. This includes the salaries/benefits for the budgeted – but so far vacant – position of youth director.



There are typically seven adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major youth programs: Sunday school, youth group and Wednesday night Bible study. Eight adults comprise the Youth Council. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

Youth activities are housed in a large building called the Wherehouse, located on the other side of the parking lot. Blessed with lots of room, it is home to the 11 a.m. Sunday school classes, Sunday night youth group and Wednesday Bible study.

Five different youth directors have led the ministry in the past decade:

Kaylee Bennett (2000-2004)
Chip McAllister (Winter 2004-Summer 2005)
Selena Fettig (Fall 2005 –July 2008)
Bryan Hinnant (Jan. 2009 – Sept 2009)
Mark Weaver (Jan. 2010 – March 2011)

The youth directors each left for a variety of reasons, but the turnover has eroded the attendance, confidence, and joy of people involved in the youth ministry. There are, nevertheless, a few steady rays of hope. During this season of transition, the youth ministry is described by some students and parents as being “energetic” or “fun.” But most acknowledge the youth ministry is “frustrating” and “in a state of flux.” One student went as far as to say, “Our youth ministry is in a recession.”

The Youth Ministry Institute was engaged to help the church to find stability during this transitional period. As part of that commitment, Youth Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the youth ministry and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. We met with 50 individuals in 10 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens we like to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the “three rents.” Youth ministries that “pay these rents” tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. And those youth ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement.

It has been our experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not insure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff and the congregation at large.

Rent #1: NUMBERS—A significant percentage of youth need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the Church Council and the staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the youth ministry is typically *more likely* to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

Rent #2: PROGRAMS—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, the youth leadership needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective youth programs that give both students and parents “something to talk about.”



Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the youth staff, volunteers and the youth themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents.

As the leadership of the youth ministry develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the youth ministry faces parallel challenges:



1. Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. Continuing to Worship on Stilts: Maintaining the *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of students, their families, the staff and the church at large.

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, four rules of thumb – or what we call “youth ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) 10% of the Worshipping Congregation—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshipping congregation. At a church with an average worship attendance of 735, we would expect to see 70-75 students active in at least one program or service each week. Instead, there are 47 active students in an average week. The participation levels have not grown to keep pace with overall church growth, and in fact, they have shrunk due to the recent churn in leadership.
- 2) \$1,200 a Kid—With a budget of approximately \$84,000 dedicated to the youth ministry, First United Methodist is investing enough for a youth ministry of 70 students – about the size it should be for a church this size. It could be argued that the church could budget for the 47 students it currently reaches, but that assumes that the church is satisfied with that sub-par level of participation. In fact, because the youth director position is currently vacant, the church is investing much less than \$84,000, and is getting a volunteer-run bargain for its dollar.
- 3) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth—According to this rule of thumb, the church is hiring enough staff to sustain the engagement of about 50 students on a weekly basis. That will be right on target for a short while. It will allow the youth director enough bandwidth to build a team that nurtures currently active kids and reaches out to the students who show up at church only for the worship service. However, as soon as the ministry gains stability and begins to reach other missing students or the friends of currently active youth, the ministry will quickly outgrow its staffing. To reach the expected youth group of 70 students, the church will need to hire additional part-time staff. Ordinarily, in over-capacity youth ministries, the youth staff is set up to be unable to fulfill all the expectations placed on them by the various constituencies of the church. And often the natural result becomes a climate of criticism and burn out.



- 4) 1 Adult for Every 5 Youth— We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five students on an ongoing basis. The youth ministry is currently at a ratio of 1 leader for every 7 youth. No wonder volunteers told us they needed more help.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE YOUTH STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. We have found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three *different* kinds of people:

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The Construction Foreman:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In youth ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to youth, or particular skills in planning and managing events, or particular skills in teaching. The youth director is often saddled with the job of being a laborer. In reality he or she needs to be the construction foreman, learning how to be an architect.

Many churches hire, as their lead youth director, someone who may have gifts in a single area-- for example, working with youth, managing a facility--but who simply doesn't have the experience base or the skill set to oversee the complex components of a ministry of 50 or more youth. The result in these situations can be a pattern of unrealistic expectations for the staff, which can lead to "scapegoating," particularly in settings in which a sustainable infrastructure for ministry has not been established.

ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

Respected and Appreciated Clergy – Leadership is of vital importance to any church. Clearly, the clergy at First UMC St. Petersburg are respected and appreciated. David Miller, senior pastor, was described in these ways:

- “Very good sermon giver”
- “He’s a strong leader”
- “I feel nourished when I hear him preach”
- “Things are done with a sense of purpose”
- “Made a huge difference in planning and structure”
- “Great vision for the church”



Dawn Worden, associate pastor, was described in these ways:

“Go getter”

“Very organized”

“Hired for her ability to build an organization”

“Approachable”

“She is the best advocate we’ve had in a long time.”

9:30 Worship – Many of our focus groups participants attend the 9:30 worship service. They repeatedly commented on the quality of the worship service. Many gave strong accolades to David Miller, Senior Pastor, for his inspirational preaching style. One participant said, “I’ve been in the church my whole life and I’ve never had a pastor that captures my attention like David Miller. He makes it easy to understand for an age range of 10-80.” Oh, by the way, that quote came from a student!

Very Interested and Committed Parents – Wow. The parents at this church really care about their youth ministry! There are parents who volunteer to teach Sunday School, parents who volunteer to keep the Sunday night youth group going, parents who have given a great deal of time to serve on the Youth Council and a number of parents who are interviewing candidates for the youth director position. One adult said, “We have always had a great group of parents that have kept things going.” Someone needs to throw a thank you party for these parents! They understand the challenges of the last few years and have done a great job of listening and empathizing with the youth in the church.

Wednesday Night Bible Study – There are a number of good things happening. But the Wednesday night Bible study stood out. Meredith, a school teacher, does a great job of engaging middle school and high school youth in the study of the Scriptures. Said one youth, “Meredith makes sense to me.” She has a way of weaving the study into application for everyday life. Most youth who participate regularly said it was the right balance of study, discussion, personal sharing and prayer. Throw Meredith a party, too!

Deep Roots – When asked to give adjectives to describe their church, many of our focus group participants gave a noun, “Tradition.” Others said things like:

“Grounded in history and traditions – but willing to step into the 21st century.”

“Established – everybody knows First United Methodist.”

Tradition was evident in countless ways. Many adults reflected on their time as youth growing up in this church. Youth and adults both told how The Wilderness Trail was begun in this church. They are proud of their time-honored traditions and the lasting effect those traditions have had on people.

Theological Diversity – The United Methodist Church invites a spectrum of theological belief. In this church the spectrum is wide and it is rich. Said one parent, “I think it is educational to have theological diversity.” Said another, “In my old church, I think everybody knew where the church stood. Here, it’s a little vague.” People passionately believe in their theological positions and are able to defend their beliefs well. This can be celebrated, too. Another party!!!

Family Oriented Church – Another phrase that focus groups used to describe the church is “family oriented” or “my family.” Many saw the church made up of many different groups of people that cared for one another like family members would. Many adults have known each other since their years in the youth group and have not known anything else but a love for their church family.

Youth Simply Want a Family – There is a strong core of committed youth with a healthy balance between middle school and early high school. It is not surprising that youth have a strong desire for a



family-like atmosphere in their youth ministry, too. What is surprising is that they mentioned this in response to the question, “If you could have anything for your youth group and money wasn’t an object, what would it be?” Their answers unanimously became tied to one theme.

“Just get to know each other more!”

“Get the family feel.”

“We just need to be one whole youth group.”

Said one adult, “All of this brokenness has distilled what they (the youth) really want.”

New and Evolving Church Structure – Shortly after David Miller arrived, the church began to develop a new system of leadership and decision-making symbolized by five pillars. While this has caused some confusion as people learn to work the new model, it has empowered lay people in the decision-making process. Many people in our focus groups appreciated the change and the empowerment given to them.

Healthy Commitment of Resources – This is a church with great resources. There is a budget that can appropriately support not only today’s ministry but also the healthy growth that can be expected over the next few years. The youth have a building dedicated to them for their activities. Recently it has been tabbed for a renovation by the Board of Trustees. There is hope that more can be done to that piece of property or other properties owned by the church. No one seems to be in opposition to that idea once stability and growth return to the youth ministry. Dawn Worden, associate pastor, has been tasked to ensure that the youth ministry becomes a vibrant and active ministry. She sees this is as her number one task. The Youth Ministry Institute has been hired to consult with the church ensuring that the person hired is provided the correct amount of training and support to be successful. There has been a lot of talk about having a good youth ministry. This church seems to be actively pursuing a *great* youth ministry.

Utilizing Communication Tools Effectively – In the book Indispensable Youth Pastor, Jeff Dunn-Rankin recalls a quote from every church the Youth Ministry Architects have ever visited: “Our communication stinks.” Well, this church now makes that statement false. When trolling around for complaints about poor communication, we didn’t find any of the normal communication problems that plague churches. People appreciated the weekly e-mail that gave information about the youth ministry. People were well aware of all the events and meetings on the calendar. The hiring of a skilled communication director has injected even more confidence in this area.

Untapped Reservoir of Volunteers – There was a real sense that people wanted to help and that they knew of others who might be willing to volunteer in the youth ministry. It is like having an untapped oil field directly underground. One adult said, “We have great potential in this area that we are not tapping – for volunteers, for leaders and, most of all, for students.” Many said that the people in this church respond well to a personal face-to-face invitation to serve. There is a wealth of energy waiting to be tapped.

CHALLENGES

Obstacles to Moving the Youth Ministry Strategically Forward

Turnover – In the last ten years there have been five youth directors, three of them lasting less than 16 months. Said one parent, “They (the youth) have felt abandoned in the last five years that I have been here. And they have been.” This high turnover rate creates a great deal of fallout. Youth show a reluctance to trust the next youth director. A lack of trust can lead to low levels of commitment and fear



that it might happen all over again. One youth summed it up well, “I’ve gotten close to all these youth directors, and I feel like the moment I develop a relationship with one, they leave.”

Fear – This feeling was shared by many. People were largely afraid of repeating past mistakes when it came to hiring and relating to the youth director. Fear can be crippling and immobilizing. It can also cause people to revert to an area of safety and places of comfort. The challenge is to own the fear and not let fear control the decision making process. One student said, “You don’t let your fear drive you. You need to drive it.”

Deeply Hurt and Looking For Stability – The departure of the past two youth directors necessitated an abrupt exit. Several youth expressed to us their hurt over not being able to say “goodbye.” A few others expressed hurt over not being consulted during the hiring process for the new youth director. This hurt runs deep. The response most often given to the hurt feelings was a desire for stability in their youth ministry. The youth just want someone who will stay.

Role Clarity – Who makes what decisions? One Youth Council member said, “We go back and forth between, ‘Is the council in charge or is the youth director in charge?’” Who makes decisions about curriculum? If the youth director and the youth council disagree, who breaks the deadlock? What is expected of the volunteers in the youth ministry? What is expected of parents? Clearly there is confusion here. When there are clear roles and expectations of behavior, the level of conflict decreases.

A Distrust of Processes – With the rather new committee structure of the church comes uncertainty about process. Processes normally take years to become engrained in a church. Both youth and adults expressed frustration with decision-making processes. In particular, the prolonged (six month) beginning to the hiring process for the new youth director created anxiety. It is important to note that the Staff Parish Relations Committee has had to deal with five job openings this year, which is unusually high. Regardless, the distrust and frustration exists.

Conflict Resolution – With theological differences as an asset and role clarity as a challenge, it only stands to reason that there will be conflict. We found that most of the conflict centered on theological teaching. Let’s be clear, there will always be a certain level of conflict in the church. That is unavoidable. What can be avoided is the resulting damage that conflict can potentially create. Said one focus group participant, “The parents can be at the root of why youth directors leave – their judgments, their lack of grace and flexibility. I don’t think parents understand the damage it does to kids’ spiritual growth.”

Listening to the Loudest – This is a conflict resolution style. One focus group member said “Our church has a lot of chiefs. There are a lot of people that are opinionated – and I’m probably one of them.” We heard a number of examples where the loudest seemed to get the most attention. Said one focus group participant, “The church has a history of listening to powerful families.” Oftentimes, the loudest don’t represent the majority. The challenge will be to create a system where everybody is heard and consensus can be built.

Volunteer Deficit – The deficit lies primarily in the Sunday night youth program. Currently there are several parents that rotate in and out of the youth group. Many of these adults are the same adults that volunteer in the youth Sunday school. This can lead to burnout. In addition, if there were a greater number of adults on Sunday night who attended weekly, this would lead to a greater number of youth committing to the Sunday night program. A healthy ratio (1:5) is described earlier in this assessment. In addition, Meredith is the only non-parent volunteer in the youth ministry currently. There needs to be a



variety of adult age people that are tasked with relating to the youth. Once consistent Sunday night volunteers are in place, they will also need some training and a job description so that they are able to joyfully live into expectations.

Constellation or All Star – The church is in the midst of hiring a youth director. There is a sense that the youth director will be able to solve all the troubles of the youth ministry. Youth and adults talk about hiring someone to whom the youth can relate. This tends to focus the success of the ministry on one person. A good youth director is not an All-Star. A good youth director is surrounded by a constellation of stars. In every youth group, you find a variety of youth with multiple interests and differing personalities. A constellation of other adults allows youth to have an opportunity to connect with a Christian mentor who matches their interests and personality.

Clarity of United Methodist Core Beliefs – While adults and some youth are pretty clear on their theological beliefs, there didn't seem to be consensus on what constituted United Methodist core beliefs. Clarifying this will help everyone when they evaluate programs and curriculum offerings. Instead of evaluating based on their personal belief system or what is taught in their own home (which will vary from house to house), they will be able to evaluate curriculum and teaching on the corporate shared beliefs of the United Methodist Church.

Fuzzy Vision – A number of focus group participants expressed frustration that there didn't seem to be a shared vision of the youth ministry. Without a clear vision and accompanying goals and strategies, the youth ministry tends to look more like a place to hang out than it does a place for spiritual formation.

Navigating Through the Rear View Mirror – For many adults and some older youth, their fondest experience of a youth ministry happened sometime in the past. Many adults fondly remembered Rob Blackburn and had a strong affinity for allowing the associate pastor to run the youth ministry because that was what worked for them then. Some remembered a favorite female youth director from the 1980s that had a spiritual impact on their life. And, some remembered Kaylee Bennett and the impact she had the early part of this century. It is great that all of these periods of time created incredible memories and became pivotal times for the faith development of youth. It is interesting to note that insiders, when reflecting on the same time period would tell us that the average attendance to youth group was anywhere from 60 to 125 depending on their perspective. For some, objects always look larger in the rear view mirror. There is a natural desire to go back there or to bring those days back to the present. However, there are no guarantees that what worked then will work in 2011.

Celebration Deficit – Focus group members indicated that it has been a while since someone threw a party at church. They had a sense that there was a shortage of thank yous and affirmations. Except for two focus group participants, everyone gave low scores when it came to the church's ability to celebrate. Furthermore, when looking at the youth ministry, the score bottomed out.

More Reflection on Scripture – We heard from multiple people (youth and adults) that there needs to be more reflection on Scripture on Sunday mornings and Sunday nights. Said one youth about Sunday school, "Sometimes it would be nice to get a Bible lesson out of it rather than just dealing with the sermon." Spiritual growth, a durable and portable faith, seemed to be the number one focus, and most people understood that it needs to be balanced with fellowship. It was impressive to hear youth talk about their desire to know and apply scripture to their life.

Welcome to the Pressure Cooker – It was acknowledged by a few of the focus groups and some personal interviews that working on the church staff as the youth director is pressure packed. One adult



said that there need to be defined boundaries for their personal life. Parents have varying expectations and aren't afraid to go the Senior Pastor when their expectations aren't met. In addition, a new youth director will be expected to be skilled to work collaboratively with a Youth Council. And, finally, the youth will want the youth director to relate to them, but might be naturally hesitant for fear this youth director, too, will leave. One parent said, "The fatal flaw in the model is a lack of nurturing and support (for the youth director)." Another parent eloquently said that there is a need for grace and patience for the person who assumes the role of youth director. Amen.

Can You Hear Me? – Giving Youth a Voice – The youth don't currently have a voice at First UMC St. Petersburg. They don't sit on any committees. They don't have their own leadership structure. They aren't even involved in the Youth Council, the group that oversees the youth ministry. And, they didn't have any official role in the current hiring process for a youth director. When expressing their displeasure one youth said, "No one listens to us." It will be difficult to run a youth ministry in which they have no voice.

Cut the Parking Lot Distance – The parking lot could be characterized by other metaphors like the Berlin Wall or the Gaza Strip or the Neutral Zone. The reality isn't quite that bad. But there is a real sense that the youth are not in sync with the rest of the church. One parent said, "Presently, something mysterious is going on at the Warehouse. Unless you have a reason to go in there, you don't know what the kids are doing." While the Warehouse is a great asset, its distance from the rest of the church is a challenge. And, with the physical distance creates an unintended disconnect from the rest of the church.

The Warehouse Needs Work – One adult said that The Warehouse is the perfect metaphor for the current youth ministry. It needs work. The tile is coming up. The rooms need to be reworked. It is uninviting. One parent suggested that it be torn down to start all over. Parents said:

- "The Warehouse might be cool for kids, but it's a little scary for parents."
- "If I had a 6th grader, I'm not sure I'd be comfortable sending her across the parking lot to that place."

Don't Believe Everything You Hear – There seems to be a certain amount of distorted truth floating around regarding people's opinions and the purposes of meetings, etc. That can be challenging and can severely hamper momentum. A culture of inaccurate or negative story telling has the potential to negatively adjust people's opinions about situations and people. The challenge will be to change the culture into one of positive story telling that lifts up the youth ministry rather than tearing it down.

Lack of High School Leadership – There presently is not a system for leadership in the youth ministry. One focus group participant said, "There is a lack of leadership traditions. We haven't cultivated those traditions." Even the informal structures of leadership have disappeared as there are no high school juniors and seniors providing leadership for younger youth.

Missing Infrastructure – Control documents such as volunteer job descriptions, youth directories, calendars, program calendar do not or are in need of updating. If a ministry is to be structured for the long haul, these things need to be in place.

Shortage Community Service – Community service isn't fully on the radar, yet. Although there were a few anecdotes about community service, they were rare. One parent said, "This is my daughter's fourth year and she has never done anything missions or a service project except for bringing sandwiches to people in Williams Park one day." This is an important missing element.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 20 months (through June 2013) as a time of direction setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target Summer 2013 as the target date for a sustainable structure for youth ministry.
- 2) Present this report to the Church Council, requesting they endorse the 20-month strategic renovation process outlined in this document.
- 3) Reboot the Youth Council as a Youth Ministry Renovation Team, made up of four to six volunteer stakeholders in the church who work in partnership with the Youth Director (details below). They will be charged with implementing the strategic timeline below. At the end of the 20-month renovation, the Renovation Team will convert back to a Youth Council.
- 4) Partner with the Youth Ministry Institute as a support system working in conjunction with the Renovation Team.
- 5) As a church, address the following Pressure Points. These issues should be addressed immediately in order to create an atmosphere conducive to change.

Pressure Point 1: Continue to move toward hiring – but don't settle for a poor fit.

- Prayerfully move toward the hiring of a Youth Director.
- To improve the odds of a good fit, make sure that each top candidate has
 - seen this report
 - embraced the goal-driven system that includes meeting every four months with the associate pastor to review 120-day objectives.
 - had a thorough conversation about the individual's personal theology
 - embraced their partnership with the Renovation Team / Youth Council – a strong committee of lay people who are empowered to make many key decisions
- Ensure that student and parent input is heard and acknowledged.
- If the right candidate has not crossed your path, redouble your efforts and keep looking.

Pressure Point 2: Launch the Renovation Team

- Work with YMI to create a 20-month job description for the Renovation Team in order to offer crystal clear roles to the members. Include the implementation of this plan and any Youth Council functions that need to be retained.
- Give the current Youth Council members the option to retire after this grueling year or offer their services on the new Renovation Team.
- Work with the Committee on Lay Leadership to identify and recruit the team.
- Schedule the first meeting before the end of the year to orient the team to its new duties and to begin working on tasks on this report's timeline.
- Ask the Associate Pastor to give close coaching to both the Renovation Team and the new Youth Director for these 20 months as they develop the processes and culture of this model of leadership.

Pressure Point 3: Improve Role Clarity

- Work with YMI to develop
 - Parent expectations and roles
 - Volunteer Job Descriptions
 - A conflict resolution plan



Pressure Point 4: Identify and Process the Hurt

- Meet with interested parents and students to offer them tools to manage the anger, fear, grief and other emotions associated with the recent turbulence in the youth ministry. Include interactive group sessions and intentional one-on-one follow-up with anyone who is interested.

Pressure Point 5: Celebrate!

Work with clergy, staff, parents and students to identify events and accomplishments that celebrate the good news of the youth ministry.

- Create a written strategy that identifies ways to celebrate, from the web page, to newsletters, to thank you notes and special times in the worship service.
- Recruit a Good News volunteer to implement clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders and the broader church to celebrate the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry. Start with the people who have given so much over the past year.
- Include updates about this renovation process.
- Over-communicate. When you get to the place where most people say “I heard that already,” you are right on target.

6) Charge the Renovation Team with building the infrastructure for future sustainability by implementing the strategic, long-term recommendations in this report as follows:

INFRASTRUCTURE TASKS THAT BUILD STABILITY

- **Control Document Development:** Complete a 15-Month Calendar, Major Event Notebooks, updated Youth Directory and Behind-the-scenes Planning Calendar. Develop permission slips for every offsite event.
- **Attendance:** Begin collecting and entering roster-driven attendance for all of the church’s weekly youth activities.
- **Pre-event Communication:** Continue the effective and timely communication with parents, youth, and leaders utilizing as many forms of communication as possible including updating the youth page of the church’s website, the dedicated youth ministry website, Facebook, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
 - Be sure to include parents in all communication directed at students.
 - Consider moving the email sending date to midweek to allow parents and students more time to plan.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent Youth Directory, a 15-Month Calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents (including Child Protection Policy and CCLI licenses), budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and notes for every major youth ministry event.



- **Fall Kick-Off:** Create and introduce a new, momentum-building event at the beginning of each school year. Plan to serve a meal, share the new Youth ministry Calendar of Events, and introduce the weekly volunteers to the parents and youth in attendance. Give out medical forms to be notarized onsite, gather event deposits, give out a few free trips, and make it fun. Celebrate!
- **7-Year Intentional Curriculum Plan:** Create an integrated template for curriculum, including a design that recognizes unique purposes for Sunday school, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening programming.
- **The Warehouse:** Appoint a small task force to continue to find ways and resources to spruce up the Warehouse, so that its appearance reflects a vibrant youth ministry on the rise.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff by enrolling the new youth director in the Youth Ministry Institute.
- **Leadership Clarity:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create a structure for the ongoing training of all volunteers at least quarterly.
- **Broaden Volunteer Definition and Opportunities:** Create new, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in the program. Encourage parental and non-parental involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Build a fortified volunteer leadership team, some of who will do relational ministry with youth while others work behind the scenes. Create a “fishing pond” list of 50 possible volunteers from all walks of life to call on for volunteer positions.
 - Focus first on recruiting for Sunday night Youth Group.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers at the beginning of each school year.
- **Student Leader Development:** Create ongoing training and support systems for high school students who are leading middle school groups. Create pathways for students to use their leadership gifts.
 - Consider inviting a core group of current and MIA juniors and seniors to engage in specific leadership roles in the spring semester of 2012.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES

- **Visioning:** Develop a Mission Statement, set of Core Values and Three-Year Revolving Goals, as well as a clear structure for the youth ministry.
- **First-Timer Process:** Develop a process for welcoming new youth to the church and visitors (such as friends) so that they feel warmly welcomed. Develop a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the youth programs.
- **Spiritual Depth and Pathway:** Develop a plan to intentionally take youth deeper in their faith through teaching and discipleship in varied environments. This plan may include small groups and gifts-based service teams. Create and publicize a deliberate plan that allows youth and parents to understand where youth are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are.



- **Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Determine reasonable participation goals for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through December 2011 and take responsibility for filling those events.
 - Share the pastor's 120-day metrics with the Renovation Team and other key volunteers each time they are renewed and reviewed.
- **Missions:** Build off the desire of youth and parents to make a difference in the world as well as their local community. Develop a clear, focused calendar for youth involvement in service activities as well as local, regional, and possibly international missions. Create a plan for promoting and exposing the congregations to youth missions throughout the year.
- **Clergy Connection:** Work with the senior pastor and associate pastor to identify occasional opportunities for them to make connections with parents and youth in way that shows their ongoing support of the ministry. Keep in mind the many other ministries and tasks that also require their attention.
- **United Methodist Doctrine:** Create resources and training processes that will ensure that teachers and leaders understand United Methodist doctrine and First United Methodist culture. Include a one-page summary of United Methodist doctrine and how it impacts teaching at FUMC.
- **Integration:** Develop a strategic plan for weaving the youth into the fabric of the entire church. Include in the brainstorming ideas like:
 - Intergenerational service projects
 - Adult teams and committees who would welcome youth participation
 - Involving the youth director and the youth more often in worship services
- **Develop New Traditions:** While embracing beloved traditions like The Wilderness Trail and Sunday Four-Square, begin experimenting with additional traditions that will build camaraderie today and lifelong memories.



PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following provides the church with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term youth ministry.

Many churches choose to use the services of Youth Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like Youth Ministry Architects to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas (Visioning Retreat and Curriculum Retreat) for the 20-month transition, we are available to help.

November 2011

Focus: Hiring and Setting the Stage

Outcomes:

- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has been selected.
- The Church Council has endorsed this 20-month renovation process.
- Dates have been set for
 - a visit from YMI to orient the Renovation Team and develop role clarity in the youth ministry
 - a February Visioning Retreat and the event is publicized to leaders and parents
- The top Youth Director candidates have
 - seen this report
 - embraced the goal-driven system that includes meeting every four months with the senior pastor to review 120-day objectives.
 - had a thorough conversation about the individual's personal theology
 - embraced their partnership with the Renovation Team / Youth Council – a strong committee of lay people who are empowered to make many key decisions
 - Ensure that student and parent input is heard and acknowledged.
- Schedule a time before the end of the year when a knowledgeable counselor can meet with interested parents and students to offer them tools to process the anger, fear, grief and other emotions associated with the recent turbulence in the youth ministry. Intentional one-on-one follow-up offered to anyone who is interested.
- An offer has been made to the top Youth Director candidate.

December 2011

Focus: Starting Right

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has been launched:
 - YMI has worked with clergy, staff and volunteers to create a 20-month job description for the Renovation Team in order to offer crystal clear roles to the members.
 - Current Youth Council members have been given the option to retire after this grueling year or offer their services on the new Renovation Team.
 - The Committee on Lay Leadership has identified and recruited the team.
 - The team has met once and been oriented by YMI to their unique roles and personal responsibilities over the coming 20 months.
 - The Associate Pastor has agreed to give close coaching to both the Renovation Team and the new Youth Director for these 20 months as they develop the processes and culture of this model of leadership.



- A list of all volunteer needs has been created and a master list of potential adult leaders has been developed, including people from a variety of age groups.
- Clergy, staff and volunteers have worked with YMI to develop
 - Parent expectations and roles
 - Volunteer Job Descriptions
 - A conflict resolution plan
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff have been provided.
- The chair of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff have received specific coaching, troubleshooting, and support from the YMI staff.
- Clergy have worked with teachers to review the curriculum plans for the upcoming semester in Sunday school, youth group and Bible study.
- Plans are in place for a welcome party and orientation process for the new Youth Director. (“Before You Hire a Youth Pastor” offers a suggested outline for this process.)

January 2012

Focus: Welcome and Marketing

Outcomes:

- The new Youth Director has started. There is a welcome party and orientation process.
- All the hands-on volunteers needed for remainder of the 2011-12 school year have been recruited.
- Clergy, staff, parents and students have worked together to identify events and accomplishments that celebrate the good news of the youth ministry.
 - There is a written strategy that identifies ways to celebrate, from the web page, to newsletters, to thank you notes and special times in the worship.
 - There is a Good News volunteer to implement clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders and the broader church to celebrate the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry. Start with the people who have given so much over the past year.
 - Good New includes updates about this renovation process.
 - The goal is over-communication. When you get to the place where most people say “I heard that already,” you are right on target.
- Details of summer events are 75% finalized, including a summer mission trip.
- The youth ministry is in full compliance with the updated child and youth protection policy.
- Processes for tracking attendance for all youth ministry events are in place.

February 2012

Focus: Visioning and Infrastructure

Outcomes:

- A Visioning Retreat, led by YMI has engaged clergy, staff, and all interested adults and youth has occurred producing Visioning documents for the Youth Ministry
 - Mission Statement
 - Values
 - Goals
 - Structure



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- On-going education and coaching has been provided by enrolling the youth director in the Youth Ministry Institute.
- The youth database has been culled and updated to include all means of communication from phone numbers to email addresses.
- The timely communication with parents, youth, and leaders has continued, utilizing as many forms of communication as possible including updating the youth page of the church's website, the dedicated youth ministry website, Facebook, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
 - Parents are included in all communication directed at students.
 - The email is sent out midweek to allow parents and students more time to plan,
- There is a 15-month calendar that includes major events through May 2013.
- A core group of three to six current and MIA juniors and seniors have been engaged in specific leadership roles in the spring semester of 2012.
- The pressure points from the assessment have all been addressed.

March 2012

Focus: Recruiting

Outcomes:

- A list of all volunteer needs for the 2012-2013 school year has been created and the recruiting of hands-on leaders and major event coordinators for the 2012-2013 youth ministry has begun.
- There is a "Fishing Pond" of at least 50 names of potential volunteers, including parents, respected adults in the congregation and mature students.
- Staff and the Renovation Team have worked together to match the "Needs" list and the "Fishing Pond" names to create a recruiting list, and staff and the Team are sharing responsibility for recruiting calls and conversations.
- The appropriate number of volunteers for summer trips has been recruited.
- There are one-year benchmarks associated with each of the three-year goals developed in February. Each benchmark includes a Next Strategic Step, a person responsible for taking that step, and a deadline.
- A template for Major Event notebooks has been created and notebooks have begun to be filled with information.

April 2012

Focus: Event Planning and Curriculum

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has completed a 6-month self-evaluation of the renovation process.
- Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation processes have been reviewed and updated by the Youth ministry Renovation Team and youth staff.
- Plans have begun for a creative & fun event to kick off the new school year for the youth.



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- Plans are in place for an end-of-the year volunteer appreciation event to occur in May/June.
- Clergy has approved a set of resources and training processes that will ensure that teachers and leaders understand United Methodist doctrine and First United Methodist culture. There is a one-page summary of United Methodist doctrine and how it impacts teaching at FUMC.
- The youth director, in conjunction with teachers, has developed a curriculum plan for the 2012-13 school year that includes a projected weekly plan for Sunday school, youth group and Bible study. (Ex. Sept. 2 – Oct. 28, study the book of John, using the following books and resources...) The Renovation Team and clergy have been offered an opportunity to offer feedback on the plan.
- 80% of the volunteers have been recruited for the 2012-13 school year.

May 2012

Focus: Volunteer Recruitment and Appreciation

Outcomes:

- Recruitment of youth ministry weekly volunteers and major event coordinators for the 2012-13 school year is complete.
- An appreciation event has been held for all volunteers in the ministry.
- A date has been chosen for a fall event to kick off the new school year.
- An enthusiasm-building volunteer training event has been calendared for August.
- A small task force has begun identifying ways and resources to spruce up the Warehouse, so that its appearance reflects a vibrant youth ministry on the rise. There are plans improvements that can be made over the summer.

June/July 2012

Focus: Fall Kickoff Planning

Outcomes:

- Invitations have been sent for the August volunteer training event.
- Final details are in place for a fall kick off event designed to welcome youth into a program they can get excited about, to introduce parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about, and to provide a forum for receiving information from youth families (sign up forms, surveys, etc.)
- Screening and background checks are complete for all hands-on volunteers for the upcoming school year.
- Curriculum resources for the 2012-2013 school year have been ordered.
- Written game plans (including implementation timetables) have been developed to reach out strategically to youth who are not currently a part of the youth ministry.
- Reasonable participation goals for youth ministry events and weekly programs have been set, and there are promotion strategies for meeting these goals.



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August 2012

Focus: Fall Kick-off and the Logistics for the Upcoming Year

Outcomes:

- The dates of all major youth ministry events and trips have been determined through September 2012 and the youth ministry calendar has been published in print, on the website and through all means of media accessed by the wider church. Registration forms are available for any youth ministry retreat or trip.
- Registration forms are available for all youth ministry retreats or trips.
- A fall kick-off event designed to welcome youth into a program they can get excited about, to introduce parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about, and to provide a forum for receiving information from youth families has taken place (sign up forms, surveys, etc.).
- All youth ministry staff and volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and revised to reflect the reality of the youth ministry.
- An enthusiasm-building volunteer training event has taken place, leaving volunteers with the sense that they have clarity about their roles, their importance, and the plans for the upcoming year.

September 2012

Focus: Major Event Planning

Outcomes:

- The youth ministry staff and pastors have met to critically evaluate the youth ministries use of the church facility and creative options have been discussed to prepare for numerical growth in the youth ministry.
- Compliance documents and training are renewed and in place (volunteer applications, Safe Sanctuaries training, music and video copyright licensing, etc.).
- Major event coordinators for all major youth ministry events from the previous year have completed Major Event Notebooks.
- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.

October 2012

Focus: Ensuring Lasting Stability and Mission Focus

Outcomes:

- All major event coordinators through August 2012 have been given an overview of their responsibilities, including how to create a notebook for the event to pass along to future coordinators.
- A quarterly volunteer training event has occurred.
- Four local mission sites have been selected and a strategy for regular visitation to these sites has been developed.
- There is a Behind-the-Scenes Planning Calendar that offers a month-by-month outline of planning tasks for each month. (Ex: February: Create the calendar through May of next year). Parts of this report's timeline can be used as a template.
- A policy regarding regional, national, and international mission project selection has been written including a clearly articulated vision for future participation within each of these options.



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November 2012

Focus: Moving into the new structure

Outcomes:

- Details of summer events are 75% finalized.
- A written, relational volunteer recruitment process has been developed, outlining when and how volunteers in the youth ministry will be recruited, with the goal of having all key positions in the youth ministry filled at least 2 months before those leaders are to begin serving.
- Communication mechanisms are re-evaluated to gauge their effectiveness. This includes both the “event announcement” functions and the “Celebration of Youth Ministry function. Changes and additions are introduced to improve visibility, etc.

December 2012

Focus: Christmas

Outcomes:

- Bake Cookies. It’s Christmas time.
- And breathe.

January 2013

Focus: A New Year – New Traditions

Outcomes:

- While embracing beloved traditions like The Wilderness Trail and Sunday Four-Square, the youth director and Renovation Team have brainstormed and begun experimenting with additional traditions that will build camaraderie today and lifelong memories.

February 2013

Focus: Integration

Outcomes:

- There is a written strategic plan for weaving the youth into the fabric of the entire church. The brainstorming included ideas like:
 - Intergenerational service projects
 - Adult teams and committees who would welcome youth participation.
 - Involving the youth director and the youth more often in worship services
- Using the Behind the Scenes Planning calendar developed in October, the Renovation Team and Youth Director are implementing the important, annual tasks involved with running a sustainable youth ministry (including creating the next year’s calendar and assessing volunteer needs).
- The date for an April Curriculum Retreat has been set.



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- A game plan is in place for transitioning from the 20-month interim structure for the youth ministry to a Youth Council structure that can sustain the youth ministry for the long haul. The plan includes a new, written job description for the Youth Council. There are plans to add youth to the Youth Council.

March 2013

Focus: Clergy Connection and Youth Ministry Manual

Outcomes:

- Working with the senior pastor and associate pastor, the Renovation Team and Youth Director have identified occasional opportunities for them to make connections with parents and youth in a way that shows their ongoing support of the ministry. Keep in mind the many other ministries and tasks that also require their attention.
- Using the Behind the Scenes Planning calendar, the Renovation Team and Youth Director are implementing the important, annual tasks involved with running a sustainable youth ministry.
- A manual for the youth ministry has been completed, including
 - Visioning Documents
 - Youth Directory
 - Volunteer Directory
 - Annual Calendar
 - Job Descriptions
 - Game Plans
 - Curriculum Template and Record of Curriculum Resources Used for the Current Year
 - Budget
 - Recruiting Template, with a Record of All the Volunteer Needs for the Year
 - Compliance Documents

April 2013

Focus: Curriculum and Discipleship Path

Outcomes:

- Using the Behind the Scenes Planning calendar, the Renovation Team and Youth Director are implementing the important, annual tasks involved with running a sustainable youth ministry.
- A Curriculum Retreat has taken place and a 7-year, integrated template for curriculum, including a design for small groups, youth group and Confirmation has been created.
- A deliberate discipleship plan that allows youth and parents to understand where youth are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs has been created.

May 2013

Focus: Renovation Team Celebration

Outcomes:

- Using the Behind the Scenes Planning calendar, the Renovation Team and Youth Director are implementing the important, annual tasks involved with running a sustainable youth ministry.
- Using the discipleship pathway, new programming has been created and implemented to ensure that all youth are being challenged to grow in their faith.



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- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team and the other teams of the Youth Ministry are celebrated, having discharged their infrastructure-building duties. Many members of these teams continue to be involved in the youth ministry in some rolls.
- The role and scope of the members of the Youth ministry Renovation Team have been redefined and the team has morphed into a more permanent Youth Council with a strong partnership with the Youth Director.



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