



Report for  
Leesburg United Methodist Church

September 16, 2018



The Weekend Innovation Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the Leesburg United Methodist Church staff and their NLI leadership team. It has been an honor to share in this time of prayer and discernment together as we explored how God has blessed your congregation and the next innovations of your ministry.

# Strengths

## 1. Facility

The congregation loves the historical nature of the church. The facility's strengths reside in its stability, longevity, and central location in the historic town of Leesburg. We also noted the pride with which the church cares for the buildings.

## 2. Worship

This congregation values its worship experiences. Sermons and music, welcoming of people, enjoyment of community time together, and deepening faith in Christ are all important aspects of worship life as reported by weekend participants.

## 3. Leadership

Leesburg's leadership demonstrates a high level of gifts and spiritual strengths. Many interviewees mentioned Pastor Jim's sermons and "super power" in his ability to remember names. The staff demonstrates hard work and complementary giftedness.

## 4. Investment in the Future

Leesburg's congregation has shown efforts to work together in many ministry areas in order to grow and change. Currently, there is renewed willingness to invest time and energy in planning for a fruitful future for Leesburg UMC.

## 5. Maturity in a Life of Service

On the Real Discipleship survey, the congregation showed great maturity in the area of sharing gifts and talents to join Jesus in mission. This is reflected in the wide-ranging amount of missions and ministries done by a variety of groups in the church, with special mention going to the Youth SPY team and the variety of United Methodist Women's missions.

# Concerns

## 1. Lack of focus and completion

If you've been at Leesburg UMC for a few years, you've probably experienced more than a few visioning, strategic planning, or decision-making processes. Some of these are completed, but we heard from many that this is not always the case. At times processes begin and then fizzle out or disappear before completion. Vision does not appear to be in the 'driver's seat' and people are often



frustrated trying to understand the latest and greatest ideas and plans; should they get involved? Will this just be a phase, or a completed plan?

## 2. Struggles with Hospitality

Mystery worshippers told us that Leesburg's hospitality was not consistent. One middle-aged woman was completely ignored by the congregation, while a young family felt incredibly welcomed. People are not sure how to find the building and parking is often an issue. The building itself struggles to be welcoming, with signage that is hard to see and follow, an elevator that does not reach the top floor, confusing entrances, and a very narrow narthex area for greeting and mingling.

## 3. Lack of clear communications

Every single individual and group we interviewed mentioned "the C-word", *communications*, as a struggle at Leesburg UMC. Even your youth noted their church was not good at communications and needed to improve in this area. This is exacerbated by a lack of coordination between missions and programs, and the impression that many existing programs or entities are unaware of what others are doing.

## 4. Missed Connections

Saturday retreat participants and Newcomer/Young Adults (in Friday night interviews), reflected that they did not feel the church had joined deeply into outreach and evangelism in and connecting with the local Leesburg area. Another missed connection is between congregation members themselves, as many expressed a feeling of being four different congregations in separate worship services.

## 5. Untapped Gifts for Service

Leesburg UMC is not known for any particular missional work that is done, but rather small groups of people work in individual areas of interest. In addition, we recognize the great resources God has blessed this church with in time, talents, gifts, and a love of serving. Imagine if the whole church used its gifts, talents, and resources to recognize and alleviate a challenge faced by the neighbors and community that surrounds the church? This would truly be living into God's vision for loving our neighbors!



# Next Level Innovations

*To become a competent and compelling congregation in the twenty-first century is a very complex, messy, hard, culture-changing and long process. It requires a great deal of prayer, endurance, hard work, dedication, risk and tenacity. Bob Farr and Kay Kotan, Ten Prescriptions for a Healthy Church*

## 1. Vision and Alignment

**Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.**

**—Habakkuk 2:2**

When a church is clearly aligned around a vision, it is much easier for the staff, the leadership, and the congregation to do the work of making disciples for the transformation of the world with clarity and purpose. The gifts of the church community are best stewarded and time and energy is not wasted when there is clarity of vision. There is less burnout of leaders and more joy in the ministry. We discerned that it is essential for this church to have clarity around and alignment with the existing vision, as it seeks to move to the next level of God's calling. Leesburg's current vision is: "To be followers of Jesus - one with God and with each other - ministers to all the world."

The existing Church Leadership Team (CLT), including the Senior Pastor and with the assistance of the NLI Mentor, will become responsible for helping the church steward their energy, finances, facilities, staffing, outreach, and mission around the vision.

1. CLT will help determine priorities and resources according to this vision. The basic questions for alignment are: Does this align with the vision? Is this where God is calling us to prioritize our time and resources? Is Vision in the driver's seat?
2. As part of the alignment, the CLT should become a learning team reading and discussing the following books:
  - a. *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger: so that the church can see a picture of holding vision for the church
  - b. *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown: so that the church will have a better understanding of how to be strategic in making and implementing critical decisions regarding alignment.
  - c. One of the best books on the changes and adaptations churches face today is *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger, and our understanding is that the CLT and staff read this book this year. So that there is a common language to discuss future adaptive changes necessary for the church, please have all new CLT and staff members read this book, and bring a team to hear Tod Bolsinger speak on **March 21, 2019** at Annandale UMC; contact Sarah Calvert at the Bi-District office to facilitate.
  - d. The team should meet with other Next Level Innovation churches that have worked on vision alignment specifically; contact Sarah Calvert for introductions.
3. By **April 2019**, meet as a team with the Mentor to discuss and develop a vision alignment plan that specifically addresses and helps develop vision for the following areas:



- a. Alignment of staffing and staff job descriptions, with specific instructions to the Staff Parish Relations Committee (see Staff and Communications Innovation below)
  - b. Alignment around a communications plan that will facilitate clarity and understanding of both the vision, and how the future of the church will align with the vision (See Communication and Staffing Innovation below)
  - c. Alignment of all missions and ministry, so it is clear how the work of the church is in alignment with the vision and how this alignment will stay clear. (See Reach and Connect Innovation and Missional Engagement Innovation below.)
  - d. Alignment around the Hospitality for the Next Generation Innovation.
  - e. Alignment around a vision for leadership training, so that there is a growing cadre of leaders who learn how to do this work of alignment and vision.
  - f. By **June 2019**, these alignment components (a.-f. above) should be complete so that the CLT can focus on coming alongside the implementation of these innovations.
4. The ongoing work of the CLT should become clearly aligned with the vision and the plan developed here, and that team should hold each other accountable to the vision. As decisions need to be made, this team should continue to practice and develop the habit of clear alignment with vision. The CLT will hold quarterly meetings with the NLI Mentor to review work completed to date, make adjustments, and be accountable until **June 2020**. Plan an annual retreat for retiring and new CLT members to spend time working together on this ongoing task of vision alignment.

## 2. Hospitality for the Next Generation

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.**

—Hebrews 13:2

Leesburg UMC is blessed to be in a vibrant “downtown” location with new neighbors that are younger and looking for engagement. When these neighbors become visitors, Leesburg UMC has the possibility to show radical hospitality. Reaching these new neighbors requires a new perspective on how to show hospitality that is not hindered by building functionality or an inwardly focused congregation.

1. The Connect Team will develop and implement a comprehensive plan for Radical Hospitality and work with the Evangelism Team to develop and implement a visitor “First Impressions and Follow-up Plan”. The CLT should review these two plans so that they are in alignment with the mission and vision. If it is helpful, these two plans can become one, as long as there is clarity about which team will be doing each item.
  - a. After an initial meeting and analysis of current practices and mystery worshipper reports, preliminary ideas for changes can become experiments for the Christmas season of 2018.



- b. All final plans for hospitality should be completed and ready for the Lenten season, 2019.
2. To do this work, the Connect Team is encouraged to:
  - a. research the hospitality visitor follow up practices of at least three other churches,
  - b. review the NLI mystery worshipper reports,
  - c. read *Beyond the First Visit* by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan.
3. By **February 2019**, the entire church will be invited to participate in a church-wide hospitality and visitor follow up training event hosted by the Connect Team based on the plans developed. The Bi-District can help provide some of this training if needed.
4. We recommend the pastor and worship team develop a church-wide sermon series on Amy Oden's *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* as a way to understand theologically how radical hospitality and connecting to visitors is part of our discipleship by God. This should be done in or around **January 2019**.
5. It would be helpful (and fun!) if the Pastor could model radical hospitality by taking a video of himself in the front of the church on a Sunday morning greeting visitors and directing traffic from the parking areas; this could become part of a welcome on the church website and training for a new team of Outside Greeters. We recommend brightly colored vests, hats, etc. and integration of multigenerational serving in this new area.
6. It was noted by mystery worshippers that there does not seem to be a standard assumption that there will be visitors on any given day, so those participating in worship are encouraged to introduce themselves each week and the plans should develop a method to ask visitors to register in some way. Follow-up with the visitors should also be part of the plans.
7. After the church-wide training, and **by the beginning of Lent 2018**, the Team will recruit, train and deploy greeters and ushers to all entrances of the church and to the parking lot to assist new visitors. If the Connect Team feels this process is successful in welcoming guests and providing better hospitality, it should be continued. If not, the Connect Team will evaluate the comprehensive plan, re-strategize and implement again.
8. As part of developing radical hospitality, Trustees will implement and develop a plan to address building issues that are related to hospitality that are in alignment with the mission and vision of the Leesburg UMC. The plan will include:
  - a. By **March 2019**, the Trustees will develop and implement a plan for adding user-friendly signage to assist newcomers in parking, accessing the building, and navigating the building. Before final placement of the signs, the Trustees will invite three people who have never been in the church before to give feedback on the placement of the new signs.
  - b. By **January 2020**, the Trustees will contract for a building audit to create a more welcoming space in line with the vision and missional needs of the church. The audit will seek to respond to major challenges like the narthex space and minor challenges



like signage and placement.

- c. The trustees will provide **quarterly** reports to the church leadership team on the progress of the audit. The completed audit will be presented to the Church Leadership Team for review for vision alignment. The Trustees will also present the results of the audit to the congregation at a place and time appropriate for the congregation.

### 3. Communication and Staffing

**You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly.**

—Ephesians 4:4-5 (MSG)

One of the most difficult things to do in a church is figure out how to communicate well with both the people of the church and with those outside the church. Regarding internal communications, we heard very clearly that people are very concerned and frustrated about a lack of clarity around communications; they see a lack of follow through, a lack of coordination, and a lack of basic use of communication tools. We have deemed this a critical issue and offer the following.

1. First, the CLT will develop some specific goals based on the vision of the church for communications and staffing, which we believe is a part of this issue, as well as the use of technology. This direction should be available by **June 2019**.
2. In the area of communications:
  - a. All staff and laity, who work with communications for the church, will work with the Bi-District staff to come up with a preliminary communications plan. The goal will be to develop excellent communications both for those inside the church and those in the greater Leesburg community. This team will be formed immediately upon approval of these innovations, and the plan will be completed by **February 2019**.
  - b. The staff will develop accountability structures to review this plan on a **quarterly** basis with both the Bi-District team and the NLI mentor. This is so there is clarity about who is doing what, when, and how around communications. These accountability meetings will be in **March, June and August 2019**, and thereafter as necessary.
  - c. If the staffing position below is hired, that person will also become part of this process.
3. In the area of staffing:
  - a. In **January 2019**, the SPRC will prepare for staffing and vision issues by reading together and discussing Susan Beaumont's book *When Moses Met Aaron* to better understand staffing in a growing church.
  - b. By **April 2019**, the SPRC should complete a review, and will offer clarification in writing, of all job descriptions and staffing needs. They will also have met with each individual staff person to make sure that staff member understands the work he or she is being asked to perform. The SPRC should review the number of hours necessary to complete the assigned work as part of this process. The CLT should also review these changes as appropriate for vision alignment.
  - c. In **July 2019**, after reviewing the visioning for staffing and communications from the CLT, we suggest the SPRC consider two additional staffing positions:



- i. A half time children’s team coordinator so that the church can have depth and breadth in reaching children and families with children.
  - ii. A full time or half time Communications Coordinator, who will be responsible for implementing the Communications Plan discussed above as well as helping with coordination and planning across all ministry areas.
- 4. In the area of technology:
  - a. In **January 2019**, the Pastor and CLT will recruit a task force of up to four people with expertise in technology to help with communication and planning. This Technology and Communications Task Force will exist for up to a year to work on developing ways that technology can be applied to improve communications and alignment of vision. Their recommendations should be brought back to the CLT as they are determined, with their final plans in areas listed below, **no later than November 2019**.
  - b. Areas of technology for communications facilitation the team should review include:
    - i. Church communications across a variety of platforms such as texting, social media, weekly email newsletters, website enhancements or updates, and staff coordination and communication.
    - ii. Live streaming, podcasting, and other ways to communicate the worship service more broadly.
    - iii. Church calendaring, attendance, and giving
    - iv. Other areas as designed by the CLT in conjunction with vision alignment.

## 4. REACH & CONNECT: Share your faith!

**The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.**

–John 1:14a (MSG)

Reaching out, sharing our faith and connecting with people are integral practices for making disciples. Your Saturday Retreat participants informed us that Leesburg desires to connect with your downtown community in more effective ways in order to reach people you are not currently reaching. Leesburg UMC can reach Leesburg, Virginia better by engaging in the following:

1. Equipping members for *Faith-sharing Fruitfulness*
  - a. The new year begins with a new class (or classes) to train, model and practice sharing our faith (**January 2019**). One of these classes should be intentionally multi-generational.
  - b. Pastor should consider a church-wide sermon series and small group program on *The Art of Neighboring* by Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak. This would be amplified by accompanying small groups discussing its insights and implementation. This is suggested in the time period after **Easter 2019**.
2. Break Through Prayer Initiative for “*Leesburg UMC Loves Leesburg*”.
  - a. Continue praying the congregational Break Through Prayers, updating for each season and woven together in 2019 with the theme “Leesburg UMC Loves Leesburg”.
  - b. Begin **Lent 2019** by praying for God’s love to flow in your hearts for a renewed love for your community. Creatively use the slogan “Leesburg UMC Loves Leesburg” in as many church ministries as possible, reminding both the church community and the neighborhoods around the church that Leesburg UMC is an essential part of their lives.





- c. In late **March and early April**, as Easter approaches in **2019**, engage members in the spiritual discipline of prayer walking in the neighborhoods closest to the church. (We understand this may begin as early as Fall 2018!) Prayer walking consists of prayerfully walking the entire surrounding neighborhoods, seeking God's discernment for how Leesburg UMC might be a better neighbor and love the Town of Leesburg more effectively and fruitfully. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* reminds us that we are the expression of Jesus in the neighborhood, and while Leesburg UMC may know Jesus well, this prayer walking will help with knowing the neighborhood and God's desires for the neighborhood better. The Bi-District can offer further resources and training in this area.

### 3. Reach Events

- a. In coordination with the Missions Team, plan for a **Summer 2019** Reach event in the surrounding neighborhoods and/or the town of Leesburg. After that event, get feedback to evaluate how well you connected with the community, and plan the next event. We suggest attempting **quarterly** events; always refining the process so that more congregation members develop relationships with people who have no church affiliation or home. More than one event per quarter may decrease your overall effectiveness. Examples may include: Worship in the Park; Blessing of the Animals in the Park; Trunk or Treat in the Community (not at the church); Block Party, or something new you dream up! (The Bi-District has resources and training events on implementing effective Outreach Events.)
- b. Deepen the connection with your Preschool families by inviting them to your new Outreach Events. Highlight your Preschool in worship with a particular Sunday when preschool families are welcomed and celebrated.

### 4. Connect

- a. Bring a plan to do deeper work in the area of Connect in 2019 to the CLT for vision alignment by **January 2019**:
- b. Invite congregation and their guests on Intergenerational Trips that explore United Methodist History (perhaps *Lovely Lane*, The Martin Luther King, Jr historical walk in Atlanta, GA; the United Methodist Building in DC) in order to connect the younger generation of Leesburg UMC with the people and the history of our church and Christian heritage.
- c. Develop a pattern of occasional intergenerational dinners or events to encourage fellowship among the entire congregation.
- d. Develop a new Seniors program. Its focus should be in fellowship as well as missions and discipleship. It became clear to us there is untapped potential in the Seniors of this community to not only enjoy each other's company, but to work in missional and discipleship areas that can connect the generations.



## 5. Missional Engagement

**For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.**

**—Matthew 25:35-36**

Leesburg UMC has deep roots in the community of Leesburg, going back more than 200 years. The Church has been blessed to be in this community, and the community has been blessed to have Leesburg UMC in its midst. As Leesburg UMC embraces a new vision for a new day, we want to encourage Leesburg UMC to embrace its community in new ways in order to advance this new vision. We note that in the Real Discipleship Survey, Leesburg reported feeling most mature in the area of “A Life of Service.”

Leaders and others identified a need for Leesburg UMC to be more engaged in serving the community, in the name of Christ. This is consistent with the part of your vision statement, “ministers to all the world.” The two largest mosaic segments of the community around Leesburg UMC (Singles and Starters, and Silver Sophisticates), have an attraction to and will engage in service to the community, so we anticipate they could be reached through participating in missional activities with church members.

The mission team can take leadership in moving Leesburg to developing more mission engagement in the following ways:

1. Develop a signature, local, hands on ministry of serving a need in the Leesburg community. The congregation has identified a desire that such a mission effort would also provide opportunities to do intergenerational ministry.
  - a. **January/February 2019:** Have Rev. Joanna Dietz, Deacon at Braddock Street UMC, come and train the mission team on how to assess available services and needs in the community.
  - b. **Late March and early April 2019,** as Easter approaches, partner with Reach Team to do prayer walks in the community as discussed in Innovation 4.
  - c. **Summer 2019:** Assess available services: Interview and research non-profits and community service agencies to find out who is already serving the marginalized in the community.
  - d. **Fall 2019:** Assess unmet needs: Study the community to identify where there are holes in needed services. Assess the gifts and passions of Leesburg UMC and where they make a good fit in meeting the needs of the community.
  - e. **January 2020:** Find partners to work with (other churches, other service agencies, non-profits, etc.)
  - f. **Spring 2020:** Begin actual service. Perhaps this could be a service worship event (see 3. below).



2. Explore the next level of Backpack Buddies in order to go deeper in ministry with a school.
  - a. **January 2019:** The mission team will read Jake McGlothin's *The Mission Minded Guide to Church and School Partnerships*, so that they will be learning about some of the latest work in this area. The Bi-District staff can help arrange for the team to meet with Rev. McGlothin if this would be helpful.
  - b. **Spring 2019:** speak with school staff to identify needs that church could meet (tutoring, reading program, school supplies for kids, etc.) If one school is not receptive, consider shifting to other schools that have unmet needs.
  - c. **Summer 2019:** Recruit volunteers
  - d. **Fall 2019,** beginning of school year: in coordination with school staff, begin this work.
3. **Spring & Fall 2019:** In order to whet the appetite for more people to be engaged in mission, offer "service worship" opportunities twice per year. Service worship is an invitation for people to attend worship and immediately go to serve in the community (which is prearranged and organized by the mission team). It is helpful if these events are in relationship or partnership with those Leesburg UMC is already serving (the same school as in 2. above, or the same ministry as in 1. above). It is helpful to continue to serve the same people with whom they are already engaged, thus deepening relationships.

## Next Steps

Leesburg United Methodist Church will hold at least two Town Hall meetings within the next 30 days to discuss this report and recommended innovations. The dates for these town halls are as follows:

- Sunday, September 23 at 12:15 p.m.
- Tuesday, September 25 at 7:00 p.m.

The congregation will vote on this report at an official church conference led by the District Superintendent (or elder designated by them) on **Tuesday, October 16 at 7:30 p.m.**

If the report and innovations are approved by a vote of 70% or more of members present and voting, the NLI process will continue as your mentor assists your leadership to implement these innovations.

If the report and innovations are rejected, the NLI process will be deemed complete and your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded.

## Report Written by:

*Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, Rev. Kirk Nave, District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Steven Summers, Rev. Dr. Michelle Chaney, Rev. Burt Robinson, Rev. Jason Duley, Kim Johnson*



# Proposed Innovations Timeline

