

## **The Future – What Might It Look Like?**

In recent days, I have been trying to articulate my vision for First United Methodist Church as we move through our 16<sup>th</sup> decade of worship and service in Gainesville. I do so from the perspective of the most recent 3+ years in our long 153-year history. They happen to be 3+ years of turn-around following 25 years of numerical decline in membership and church attendance, children and youth ministries, and young adult and family participation, though not in income that has shown a 40% increase over the last ten years.

I have addressed elsewhere the factors that I think have been significant in contributing to the turn-around. Today, I am trying to imagine what we might look for if the turn-around develops into a sustained growth pattern. Here is some of what I would look for and work towards.

- + Membership of between 750 and 1,000.
- + Worship attendance of 350 to 500 (higher than the national percentage for United Methodism).
- + Preaching and worship (in the Wesleyan Tradition) that are inspiring, relevant, theologically and intellectually stimulating, challenging and supportive.
- + Music that is broad in its range, participative and of the highest quality.
- + Growing children and youth ministries in numbers, range and educative and spiritual depth and quality.
- + Thriving ministries appropriate to the needs and interests of young adults (usually early 20's-35).
- + Attractive program activities for families (for parents and children combined and separately, including such support services as nursery, FUMPers, children and youth ministries etc.)
- + Creative new activities for younger retirees (“boomers”).
- + Continuing ministries appropriate to the needs of increasing numbers of older retirees to be anticipated in a church with a long history.
- + Comprehensive pastoral care (including sacramental ministry) for increasing numbers of older retirees as they become confined to their homes and/or nursing care facilities, and experience bereavement and end-of-life issues.
- + Comprehensive adult Christian Education ministries at various times designed to create fellowship and foster growth in Christian knowledge and discipleship.
- + Outreach into the (downtown) community among the homeless and the working poor on the one hand and professional, business and public service personnel on the other.
- + Relevant outreach into the adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- + Intentional and ongoing cultivation, recruitment and preparation of new members by clergy and laity alike.

- + Continued maintenance of our strategic property as an inviting symbol of the Divine Presence in our city and community.
- + Intentional and generous stewardship as an integral expression of our Christian discipleship to sustain adequate operational budget and longer term capital needs, with flexibility to meet new challenges and opportunities as they arise.
- + Openness to acquire adjacent property to accommodate the possibilities of growth.
- + Continued cultivation of positive and harmonious relationships with such specialized activities as FUMPers, Boy and Girl Scouts and Helping Hands.
- + Incorporation of a more focused emphasis on healing and wholeness, and on prayer
- + A strong commitment to mission and outreach beyond our own backyard.
- + A warm and sensitive embrace of newcomers seeking a sense of belonging.
- + Activities that bear witness to the fact that it's OK to have fun!
- + Re-vitalized and expanded men's ministry.

There's much more – I've had to develop this list off the top of my head. I believe our church has exciting new growth and development at its fingertips. I pray that we won't snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

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