



Report for  
St. Matthew's UMC  
October 15, 2017 Presentation



The Next Level Weekend Innovations Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to St. Matthew's United Methodist Church for participating in the NLI process so far. Your pastors, staff, leadership and your Next Level Innovations Team (NLI) are to be commended for their deep level of participation. 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 recognized God's calling to take your church to the next level.

## Strengths

### 1. Children & Youth Ministries

St. Matthew's UMC has done an excellent job in the areas of children's and youth ministries. The children's Weekday School was often mentioned as a strength, the youth missions as another strength. Over 200 children attended Vacation Bible School, many of whom were not church families. Overall parents, both long-time and new parents, are very attracted to and happy with the children and youth programs. We noted the church reaches disproportionately more families with children than actually live near the church, which is quite an accomplishment.

### 2. Staff

St. Matthew's loves its staff. The congregation mentioned the pastors' giftedness throughout the weekend as a great strength of the church, and they repeatedly affirmed their confidence in the leadership of the pastors. The church has invested in the staff so that the church is poised for new growth. We heard many compliments about the gifts and talents of the entire staff.

### 3. Music

Everyone complimented the strong music ministry including a world-renowned reputation for the bell choirs. New members want their children and youth to be part of a quality church based music program, and at St. Matthew's they are exceptional. The longevity of service and devotion to excellence of the music director was often cited as a key strength.

### 4. Exceptional commitment to the church

The NLI team has been excited to see the obvious commitment and passion of the laity of the church. This first became obvious to us after the huge crowd that came out last Spring to the Ministry Focus event. We were thrilled to see over 150 people participate in the NLI weekend, including 30 newcomers and 20 youth on a Friday night, and about 85 people who came out on a beautiful fall Saturday. They told us what they loved about their church, and what they hope will happen next. All the people we met were excited to be part of the ministries of the church and have shown it by their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

### 5. Extensive Missions and Programming

When we first heard about the tremendous number of ministries and missions and opportunities for discipleship at this church we were concerned. How could one church do so



much? As we asked throughout the weekend, we were told by newcomers, youth and longtime members that this is what you love about this church – so many options to get involved and to participate in your faith and to bless others and the world.

## Concerns

### 1. Vision and Alignment

In talking with the leadership of the church, they told us about confusion as to direction, vision, and the overall goals of the church. The Ministry Focus Event revealed that the church is going in many directions simultaneously. The vision from several years ago about working with high-risk youth and senior citizens has produced several new ministries, and that vision seems to have run its course. At this time, there is a need for a new directional vision.

### 2. Missed Opportunities to Connect

Mystery worshippers noted in several cases that they got lost coming from the parking lot to the sanctuary or children's areas. They also noted that the website was hard to read and outdated in several places. The bulletins were also a concern of the mystery worshippers and the youth pointed out that the social media program misses opportunities to reach them.

### 3. Worship Services

Statistics show a significant drop in worship over the last ten years. Although many churches are experiencing similar declines there are also churches that are growing their worshipping congregations. We think St Matthews is more than capable, and the demographics are very positive, to move toward a trend of growth and engagement with the local neighborhoods.

### 4. Small Groups

We were particularly struck by the number of people who expressed interest in additional opportunities to be in authentic Christian relationship through small groups. We also heard from people who are serving in multiple capacities in the life of the church and yet they ask "Where am I being fed?" We see this as an issue of discipleship, and part of the struggle with alignment and vision.

### 5. Financial Concerns

While there has been increased giving, and the church is debt free (congratulations!), we heard a lot of concern about the future of the building, maintenance, and program needs as well as fears there would not be enough money to cover these issues. Demographics show that this congregation is more than capable of financial strength but has not yet moved toward their full potential. The Real Discipleship survey pointed to generosity as an area for growth, and we believe this is a discipleship area as well as a financial concern.



# 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

## 1. **Growing Closer to Jesus – a working vision for St. Matthew’s**

- a. 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 community are best stewarded when there is clarity of vision, and time and energy are not wasted. There is less burnout of leaders and more joy in the ministry.
- b. We discerned that it would be essential for this church to have clarity around a fresh vision, and alignment with that vision, as it seeks to go to the next level of God’s calling on St. Matthew’s. We heard a desire to become clearer about discipleship in particular, which is why we chose this language as a working vision for NLI season. This is a temporary but valuable vision, to be replaced in the next few years as noted below.
- c. There will be a Vision Alignment Team (VAT) of 6-8 people, nominated by the Pastor with the help of the NLI Mentor, Rev. Reggie Tuck, and elected by the Church Council. Elections will take place at the next meeting of the Church Council, immediately following the Innovations vote. The VAT will implement and be accountable for producing:
  - i. All new ministries of the church will be guided by the vision *Growing Closer to Jesus*, and the VAT will help determine priorities and resources accordingly. The team will also help with alignment of existing ministry and mission around this vision. This will build up capacity for doing the work of alignment around vision as a new vision is developed. 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?*
  - ii. Over the next two years, this team will develop and propose to the church a vision for the next season of ministry. As part of this work, this team will develop clarity around a shared meaning of discipleship, so there is a common understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The goal would be completion of this new vision by October 2019.
  - iii. As part of alignment, the team will develop leadership training, so that the key leadership positions of the church are in alignment with the vision. As part of this, job descriptions and goals will be set for administrative and ministry committees. This will be accomplished by September 2018 for the 2019 nominations.
  - iv. As part of the alignment around the vision, the SPRC should review the staff job descriptions. The Senior Pastor will work with the staff to set their goals in alignment with the vision.
- d. As part of the alignment, the Church Council should read some books together by June 1, 2018:



- i. *Membership to Discipleship* by Phil Maynard, so that the Council can focus on helping the church align with the vision of *Growing Closer to Jesus*.
- ii. *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolinger, so that there is a common language to discuss the future adaptive changes necessary for the church.
- iii. *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, so that the church can see a vision of how a church can be aligned for effectiveness.

## 2. Communications

- a. Staff and passionate, committed laity chosen by the staff shall serve on a Communications Team to develop a strategic communications plan by August, 2018, including:
  - i. Updated website design so that people can more easily access information about the church. The District can provide training and resources to help with this area as necessary.
  - ii. Evaluate the church presence on social media so that younger generations are more effectively reached.
  - iii. Review and redesign of the bulletins through the eyes of a guest or occasional attendee so that worship is more accessible.
  - iv. Members of the team should attend the District's ongoing communications events to facilitate planning with the latest tools and understandings of church communications.
- b. The Communications Team should explore new banner technology that allows banners to be quickly and inexpensively made to assist in communicating new sermons series, programs and ministries no later than the Easter season 2018.
- c. By March 1, 2018 the Trustees should evaluate interior and exterior signage through the eyes of a guest, so that more people are easily welcomed into the building. The Trustees will complete the signage by June 1, 2018 after inviting three people who have never been to the building to help place any new signage.

## 3. Worship

- a. Worship is an essential part of discipleship and should be accessible to as many people as possible. That is not currently the situation with the worship and Sunday school options at St. Matthew's. In order to improve the full Sunday experience of worship and discipleship, the Senior Pastor will nominate 4-6 passionate and committed people (then approved by the Church Council) for a new short-term strategic worship planning team. This team will evaluate the current schedule with a goal to provide an opportunity for all age levels to engage with Sunday School and worship. In particular, there was an expressed desire for the youth to be able to participate in the modern worship service without having to choose between Sunday School/Confirmation and worship. First meeting of the team will be by February 1, 2018. The implementation will begin in September of 2018.
  - i. Some possible alternatives we heard this weekend that might be considered by this team include:



1. Adding a second Sunday school hour
  2. Running concurrent worship services in different locations
  3. Running one of each style of worship services and one separate hour of Sunday School
  4. Possibly a Sunday evening service, or weekly youth service
- b. Permanent Worship Planning team
- i. To improve the overall worship experience and communications the Senior Pastor will form a permanent worship planning team including clergy, music leadership, and passionate and committed laity.
  - ii. This team should be formed by May 1, 2018, and it is suggested they begin by reading together *Overflow* by Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin.
- c. In order to facilitate fellowship and the welcoming of guests, there was an overwhelming request for a time of refreshments after each worship service. This should begin by June 1, 2018.

#### 4. Next Level Discipleship and Small Groups

*"I am hungering for authentic community in a small group" (one of the participants this weekend)*

- a. The Discipleship Team is currently not meeting, however they should reestablish with passionate and committed laity and the appropriate staff by February of 2018 to begin working on a plan for St. Matthew's to make disciples for the transformation of the world.
- b. In several of our meetings with the church, we heard a desire for opportunities where people can build authentic relationships and help support one another in their Christian walk. This is a piece of the puzzle to develop an overall discipleship system. One goal of the team should be the development of at least two new home based small groups each year so that there are more opportunities for authentic Christ-centered relationships where people live and the influence of the church goes deeper into the communities in which people live. This is part of how a disciple goes deeper into their life as a Christian.
- c. There was also an expressed desire for venues where current cultural and social issues are discussed from a faith perspective. This desire came from both adults and youth. The Discipleship team should consider and plan how to meet this need, including more small groups around the issues, sermons, or church-wide studies. This should be accomplished by November of 2018.
- d. Ultimately, the Discipleship Team should develop a full plan for their work. The Virginia conference has set a goal that all churches will have a plan for making disciples in their congregation. Since other churches are working on these goals, the Discipleship team can consult with their NLI cohort churches and others to help with this work.
  - i. There will be a District training on March 15, 2018 on the development of discipleship processes that the team should attend.
  - ii. In addition, the team could read one or two of the following books that will help them develop this process over summer of 2018:
    1. *Building A Discipleship Culture* – Mike Breen
    2. *Membership to Discipleship* – Phil Maynard



### 3. *Disciples Making Disciples* – Steve Manskar

- e. The team should be ready to present a plan to the Church Council by February of 2019.

## 5. Generosity

- a. In order to help further disciple the congregation in generosity, in December of 2018 the Stewardship Team will begin a study of the finances and potential giving of the congregation, developing a strategy for generous giving. We heard a desire in the congregation and leadership to have more funding for capital improvements of the building, missions, programs and ministry of the church. We would like the Stewardship Team to consider an extraordinary giving campaign or a capital campaign. Improving the spiritual discipline of generosity would allow all of these areas to be addressed, so this should be the focus of the work of the Stewardship Team.
- b. In order to enhance discipleship with this goal, the Stewardship Team will coordinate an initiative for faith and finances in a small group, such as Financial Peace University or other similar programs. This specifically is intended to help connect discipleship and giving, as we noted this was an area where there was potential for growth in the Real Discipleship survey.

### **ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT:**

St Matthews UMC has shown passion and gifts for doing ministry offsite, in venues such as Aarondale Assisted Living and in programs such as Pub Theology. The WIT team recommends that, after these Innovations are satisfied, the Pastor and church explore, along with the mentor and District Superintendent, creating a new faith community located outside of the church building. The health and vitality of this church can and should be, we believe, reproduced. The District and Conference can provide resources and training to help with this process.



## Next Steps

St. Matthew's United Methodist Church will hold at least two Town Hall meetings within the next 45 days to discuss this report and recommended innovations. The dates for these town halls are as follows:

- Sunday, October 22, at 4pm
- Thursday, November 9 at 7pm

The congregation will vote on this at an official church conference led by the District Superintendent on November 12, 2017 at 4pm.

If the Innovations are approved by a vote of at least 70% of members present and voting, the NLI process will continue and your mentor and District will assist your leadership in the implementation of these innovations. The vote will be take on the Innovations as a whole, and not individually.

The commitment to these next level innovations should be celebrated during a special worship service after an approval of the church conference. The worship service will be a time of prayer and celebration. Participants will have the opportunity to come forward to be blessed and commissioned for this new chapter of ministry in the life of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church.

If the report and innovations are rejected, the NLI process will be deemed complete for St Matthew's, your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded, and prioritization of St Matthew's for training and resources at the District level will end.

### **Report Written by:**

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