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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Project Thesis

A NEW FUTURE FOR AN HISTORIC METHODIST CHURCH

by

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A NEW FUTURE FOR AN HISTORIC METHODIST CHURCH

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Boston University School of Theology, 2020

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ABSTRACT

The United Methodist Church (UMC) in America has seen a steady decrease in the number of millennials who regularly participate in the life of the church. In my own church, Ellensburg United Methodist Church (EUMC), one of the fears many congregants have is that while we seek to adapt in order to reach millennials, we may forfeit our Wesleyan heritage. This project seeks to develop a strategic plan to guide the growth and development of EUMC that's focused on engaging millennials and increasing the congregation's knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, utilizing Aubrey Malphur's model for advanced strategic church planning.

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GLOSSARY

Millennial: Millennials are the demographic cohort following Generation X and preceding Generation Z. Most researchers use 1982 as a starting birth year and the late 1990s as ending birth years.

Mainline Protestant: Mainline churches include the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America, among others. Because of their involvement with the ecumenical movement, mainline churches are sometimes given the alternative label of ecumenical Protestantism. These churches played a leading role in the Social Gospel movement and were active in social causes such as civil rights and equality for women. As a group, the mainline churches have maintained religious doctrine that stresses social justice and personal salvation. Politically and theologically, contemporary mainline Protestants tend to be more liberal than non-mainline Protestants.¹

Attractional Church Model: This concept was popularized in the 1990s and was built around the idea that if churches could produce the right style of worship (i.e. music or preaching style), and market themselves in the appropriate way, more people would attend.

¹ Definitions.net, “Mainline protestant,” last modified 2019, <https://www.definitions.net/definition/mainline%20protestant>.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

David met me at my office on a warm spring afternoon. He called me the day before we met and shared about how excited he was that I would be serving as the new senior pastor at his beloved church, Ellensburg United Methodist Church (EUMC). He couldn't wait to meet with me to share about the history of the church and his experience serving as a lay leader. David is in his early 60s, and his family has been in Ellensburg for more than three generations. He is well-known and loved in this small town, and he has been a member at EUMC since he was a child. I was looking forward to meeting with him and hearing more about his love for EUMC and his vision for the future of the church.

The sun shone in through the stained-glass windows in my office onto David's face, providing a wonderful glow of orange and red. As soon as he entered my door, he began to share about his experience growing up at EUMC. "Church culture was so different back when I was a kid in the 1960s," he said. "As far as I know, there were no mega-churches, non-denominational churches or evangelical churches here in town. We would have a couple hundred people in service each week at EUMC, and our youth group, the Methodist Youth Fellowship, was the largest youth group in town! A lot has changed since 1965." He sighed as he leaned back in the green cushioned chair situated in the corner of my office. "I left for college in 1971. At that time our church was flourishing, but when I graduated from college and moved back to Ellensburg six years later, our congregation looked completely different."

I wondered what had happened in the six years between David leaving for college and when he moved back to open a pharmacy on Main Street. What changed that caused

so many people to start leaving the church? As I listened to David share, I couldn't help but think of my own experience growing up in the church and now witnessing this shift as young people had begun to find their community outside of the church. I shared with David about my experience growing up in the Evangelical tradition and how that was much different than the United Methodist Church. He knew I would have quite the learning curve, but he believed my experience as a college pastor and worship leader in various other churches and geographical locations might contribute to the eventual growth and development of EUMC. He hoped that my evangelical and millennial lens might provide a fresh perspective and approach to ministry for our church.

David went on to share his own concerns about the dwindling of church attendance. "The culture had changed so much in America. Mainline churches seemed to be losing their appeal, and overall, I think most of the people I knew became less interested in going to church in general. They seemed to find the kind of community and support they were looking for in other places." This didn't stop David and his wife from returning to EUMC upon graduating from college. Soon after they moved back to Ellensburg they became deeply involved at the church and would eventually baptize their children at EUMC.

David went on to share that church attendance continued to dwindle through the 1980s and 1990s with the surge of the attractional church model, and new non-denominational churches started popping up around Ellensburg. Not only were these new church plants providing state-of-the-art Sunday worship experiences complete with light shows, live bands and video montages, but they were also extremely conservative.

These churches preached a hard line of morality, and that message seemed to be gaining steam in this small community that was made up mostly of ranchers, farmers and small business owners.

“Our church has always been on the fringes of this community due to the many members who are more theologically and politically progressive. And we have always been committed to social justice. That’s foundational to Methodism,” David said. “In fact, in the 1990s, our pastor Lowell Murphree began to explore the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion. He led the congregation through a “reconciling” process which led us to become the first church in Ellensburg to marry and ordain LGBTQ+ individuals.” David failed to mention how this process of becoming a reconciling congregation caused a major stir in town, and EUMC lost about 30% of its members in the wake of this decision.² They were the only church in town at the time that was willing to engage this issue. However, EUMC was so committed to issues of justice that they largely ignored the negative effects of their decision to become a reconciling congregation and continued to fight for marginalized people. “In the past 20 years, EUMC has been perceived by the community as hopelessly liberal, and sometimes people even refer to us as ‘the gay church.’ This has put a real strain on our attempts to grow and reach younger families,” David said.

In my short time serving in this new role as senior pastor I had discovered that engaging young families was a top priority for many of the church members. The

² Lowell Murphree, 1997, Church Records, Ellensburg United Methodist Church, Ellensburg, WA

realization that we were seen as “the gay church” by many in the community struck me as a real obstacle to creating a diverse and multi-generational community. Especially since many young families were more concerned with what kind of children’s programs were offered at church than what kind of theology was being taught. I knew that David, along with other members, really wanted to be seen as a church for all people, and they also wanted to engage more young people in this community. He focused his point, “I hope that in five years, our church is thriving, and that we have lots of young families and college students. I also hope that as we grow, we preserve our Wesleyan heritage, maintaining our passion for social justice and our desire to discuss and engage deep theological topics.”

As our time drew to a close, David couldn’t help but get emotional as he shared the things he loves most about EUMC: “This church just feels like a family. We have always been accepting of all people, and my wife and I can’t imagine going anywhere else. I consider myself a committed Christian, I have a Jewish brother and a Catholic sister, and at least one of my kids is now an atheist, and yet I feel like we’re all welcome here. Everyone feels comfortable attending when we’re all in town. That’s something special.” What a beautiful image, I thought. A community of pilgrims on the faith journey, all in different places, all committed to equality, theological exploration, social justice, and caring for people. Unfortunately, despite such a compelling vision, the number of regular attendees at EUMC’s weekly service continues to dwindle, and we are now faced with the task of reinventing ourselves for a new generation. There is also a growing desire among our church members to embrace our Wesleyan heritage in the

midst of a potential denominational schism. David reached out to shake my hand and offered one closing remark, “Mark, I’m so thankful you’re here, and I’m hopeful that you can help us develop a new vision. We need more young people here and this church really does have a lot to offer.”

Many recent studies show that while millennials do care about spirituality, they are less interested in institutionalized religion than previous generations. This lack of interest has led to a rapid decrease in church attendance across the country, and not just in mainline protestant churches. As the incoming pastor of EUMC I knew I would be tasked with leading this congregation through a process of rediscovery, and the congregation was poised and excited to learn about new ways to engage with young people in our community. However, several church members did express the fear that this strategic process would produce significant changes in how we practice our faith. They were worried that as we sought to adapt and change, we would lose our Wesleyan roots, forsaking them for a more modern or relevant church. I knew my job was to keep this in mind as we began this process of strategic planning. While I felt that the future of our church depended largely on our ability to adapt to a changing culture, I knew we must simultaneously find a way to embrace our Wesleyan roots. My first few months on the job would include building a team of leaders around me to help guide our process of rediscovery.

The work of strategic church planning depends on having a solid understanding of the community and the culture of the church. In other words, this work is highly contextual. While I would spend the first several months on the job building

relationships and understanding the church culture, I knew my first few months would conveniently provide me with a brief “honeymoon phase” which seemed like a unique opportunity to present my vision for developing a strategic plan to church members. This proved to be true, and at our second church council meeting, our group decided to embrace my proposed method for developing a strategic plan. Our goal was to develop a strategic plan that would allow us to do a better job of engaging young people in this community, particularly college students and young families. We also hoped to build upon our strengths as a church and upon the foundations of our Wesleyan heritage. More specifically, we hoped to highlight the elements of John Wesley’s life and ministry that seemed to complement what the research shows young people are searching for in a faith community: hospitality, justice, and a commitment to theological study. We hoped that by highlighting these core Wesleyan principles, and by gently shifting our church culture towards building an environment that might be more attractive to millennials, our congregation would begin to grow. We wanted to see a significant increase in the number of college students and young families engaging at EUMC.

Our team chose to utilize Aubrey Malphur’s process for advanced strategic church planning in the church because built in to Malphur’s process is a commitment to collaboration. Malphurs encourages working as a team, with a point leader who focuses on facilitating and guiding the planning process. Throughout his book, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Malphurs offers clear guidelines and methods for churches who are developing a plan and he provides strategies for the point leader to foster healthy dialogue among team members. Malphur’s methods also provide a clear process for

implementation and evaluation. I know in order for this process and plan to be successful, we would have to work together as a team. While I hoped to guide our team, I would largely be depending on the knowledge and commitment of our team members to help craft and implement our strategic plan. Transformational leadership is about working as a team to identify the strengths and areas of growth in an organization and allowing those strengths to inform the creation of goals. Once the goals were defined, we would work together to construct a framework for how to reach those goals. Malphur's process provided the necessary guidelines and tools for our team, and ultimately our entire congregation, to work together to build a plan that would hopefully lead to healthy growth and a bright future for EUMC.

CHAPTER TWO: STANDING AT A CROSSROADS

Mainline Protestant churches are shrinking, and many people today feel that institutionalized religion has little to offer them in our largely progressive and transient culture. While churches have seen a recent decline in every age group, the millennials, those born between 1980 and 2001, are “the least religiously observant youths since survey research began charting religious behavior.”³ This younger generation is no longer looking to the church to provide spiritual guidance and nourishment. Nor are they going to church to socialize and build lifelong friendships like their parents did. Millennials now seem to find their sense of community elsewhere. Even when they do decide to get involved in a church, they often don’t stick around long, as millennials are one of the most transient generations in history.

According to a recent study released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the average worker today stays at each of his or her jobs for 4.4 years, but the expected tenure of the workforce's youngest employees, made up mostly of millennials, is about half that.”⁴ That means that adults between the ages of 18 and 39 are only staying in jobs for an average of two years, and the changing of jobs often means moving locations.

³ According to a 2009 study, which was originally conducted by PEW Research, also showed that millennials are the most ethnically and racially diverse cohort of youth in the nation’s history and they are more politically progressive than their predecessors. More can be found here: Derrick Feldmann and Kari Dunn Saratovsky, *Cause for Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2013), 37.

⁴ Jeanne Meister, “The Future of Work,” *Forbes*, August 14, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/the-future-of-work-job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials/#6f210c3e13b8>.

Simply put, millennials are less interested in planting roots in a community and raising a family in one place and more excited about exploring new opportunities and new communities. This poses a threat to churches that seek to build a solid foundation of committed members. Today, as compared to 20 years ago, people are less interested in becoming official members of a church. As a result, historic mainline protestant churches that once enjoyed healthy rosters are now seeing a major drop in membership. Not only that, but regular church attendance has also dropped significantly over the past two decades.

A recent study published by the Pew Research Center found that from 2007 to 2014 attendance at mainline protestant churches dropped by 4%. This means that five million fewer adults were attending mainline churches in America in 2014 than in 2007.⁵ Additionally, mainline protestant churches have one of the lowest retention rates of any major religious tradition, with only 45% of those raised in the faith continuing to identify with it as adults.⁶ On average, the younger the person, the less likely they are to continue attending a church as they grow older.⁷ Today, mainline protestant churches not only see

⁵ Michael Lipka, “Mainline Protestants Make Up Shrinking Number of US Adults,” Fact Tank, May 18, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

⁶ Michael Lipka, “Mainline Protestants Make Up Shrinking Number of US Adults,” Fact Tank, May 18, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

⁷ According to a 2018 study by the Barna Group, “The percentage of teens who identify as atheists is double that of the general population (13% vs. 6% of all adults). The proportion that identifies as Christian likewise drops from generation to generation. Three out of four Boomers are Protestant or Catholic Christians (75%), while just three in five 13- to 18-year-olds say they are some kind of Christian (59%).” More can be found here: Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles

fewer people in the pews each week, but many of these churches are literally closing their doors because of this drop in attendance and low retention.⁸ This trend is especially true in the United Methodist Church (UMC) in America, which has lost more than one million members since 2009.⁹ And of the roughly 6.8 million members in America, only 37% are under the age of 40.¹⁰ This reflects a sharp decline in the number of young people between the ages of 18 and 39 who are attending church today compared to twenty years ago.¹¹

Among Generation Z,” Research Survey, last modified January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

⁸ The most comprehensive data on national church participation comes from the 2014 and 2015 Pew and Barna studies. However, according to more recent publications these trends have continued, and church participation among millennials continues to dwindle. For more information visit: Barna Group. “The State of the Church,” Research Survey, last modified September 15, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>.

⁹ United Methodist Church, “UM Facts,” UM Data, last modified 2020, <http://www.umdata.org/UMFactsHome.aspx>.

¹⁰ Pew Research, “Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research, last modified 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-family/methodist-family-mainline-trad/>.

¹¹ Standing in stark contrast to the decline in attendance many mainline protestant churches are facing, is the fact that many conservative evangelical protestant churches are actually seeing slow growth among millennials. According to a 2017 article published by Dr. William Briggs in *The Stream*, while mainline protestant churches are seeing a decline in attendance, more conservative evangelical churches are seeing growth. He references a study published by the *Washington Post* that attributes this decline to the more liberal theology of mainline protestant churches. The study concludes that, “Conservative Protestant theology, with its more literal view of the Bible, is a significant predictor of church growth while liberal theology leads to decline.” Learn more here: David Haskins, "Liberal Churches Are Dying. But Conservative Churches Are Thriving," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/01/04/liberal-churches-are-dying-but-conservative-churches-are-thriving/>.

My own church, EUMC, has been wrestling with the challenge of attracting more young people for several years. While our congregation is full of brilliant and passionate people who are committed to fighting for justice in Ellensburg and abroad, we, like many mainline protestant churches around the world, are watching church attendance and participation flatline. Despite the fact that our church is focused on issues that studies say millennials tend to care about, e.g. social justice and theological liberalism, EUMC has still been largely unsuccessful in our efforts to attract and retain these individuals. According to EUMC church records, in 2012, the average weekly attendance for a Sunday church service was 61 people. Today, the average attendance on a Sunday is 68. In seven years of serving this community, building relationships, faithfully planning and executing weekly services, and working hard to serve marginalized populations, EUMC's weekly attendance has remained largely stagnant. By my own estimate, and based on the available records, approximately 75% of EUMC's regular congregants are over the age of 60, which poses a threat to future growth and development, as we lack the voices of young people from our community.

Of the 180 members on the roster at EUMC, only five constitute as millennials, which means they fall between the ages of 18 and 34.¹² Each week, the congregation may include a few young families and a handful of college students, all sitting in a room full of people who on average are between the ages of 60-80. If EUMC does not begin to focus on engaging young people, the regular church attendance, as well as increasing our

¹² Like many churches, our membership roster does not reflect our regular attendance. This list is a collection of any person that has elected to join the church in the past 20 years but many of those individuals no longer attend the church.

connection with young families and college students in our town, will continue to decline as elderly members become unable to participate in the life of the church. The problem goes beyond church attendance, unfortunately. EUMC is also struggling to find ways to connect with this younger generation and encourage them to participate in our faith community. One of the greatest challenges EUMC is facing as we seek to engage more young people is our reputation as “the liberal church” in a largely conservative town.

With a population of roughly 18,000 people, Ellensburg, known as the rodeo capital of the Pacific Northwest, primarily attracts middle-class white farmers, ranchers and college professors.¹³ While Ellensburg has historically had a reputation for being a conservative town, with the growth of the local university, Central Washington University (CWU), the culture is beginning to shift. CWU has a reputation for being a more liberal institution, creating safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students and offering classes for those interested in understanding climate change and immigration issues. Thanks to the influence of CWU, Ellensburg has begun to shift away from its more conservative identity and towards a more progressive cultural identity. This could prove beneficial to EUMC as we seek to serve and connect with the Ellensburg community and students at CWU, which is situated just one mile from our church.

CWU sits in the heart of downtown Ellensburg and the university’s enrollment almost mirrors the town itself. Each Fall, approximately 13,000 students show up to

¹³ US Census Bureau, “How Many People Live in Ellensburg,” Suburban Stats, last Modified 2019, <https://suburbanstats.org/population/washington/how-many-people-live-in-ellensburg>.

begin a new quarter of classes, and Ellensburg transforms from a small rural town to a bustling college town. Unfortunately, even with this influx in college-aged individuals and its close proximity to the CWU campus, EUMC has yet to find a way to attract and retain college-aged adults in our congregation. As the incoming senior pastor, I was immediately made aware of the congregation's desire to engage this younger generation and of their inability to develop a sustainable method of doing so.

Several weeks before I took over as the new pastor at EUMC I began meeting with the exiting pastor, Jen, who was preparing for her own move to a new church in Oregon. We met several times to discuss the history of the church and share ideas about how the church might change to attract more young people. Jen had worked hard to establish new leadership structures and to tighten up the church budget. However, she admitted that there were many areas where the church still needed improvement, and she was hopeful that I might continue their positive trajectory. During our first meeting she shared that many church members, herself included, were hoping to improve the curb appeal of the aging church building, in an effort to attract new visitors. She also shared that the leadership council was open to updating the church signage and the website. As a millennial I understood the importance of these things and I was excited that the leadership council was poised for change. She went on to say that a majority of the members hoped to continue serving the community and supporting organizations committed to social justice. I thanked her for the insight and I humbly requested that she begin to plant some seeds with other leaders in the church. She had been serving this church for five years and these people trusted her. I asked if she would consider having

some preliminary conversations about potential new plans with influential members in the church? She agreed to meet with several members of the leadership council before she left to begin sharing with them about potential areas of growth for EUMC. This proved beneficial for me as the incoming pastor, as I was able to simply continue these conversations that Jen instigated instead of immediately introducing potential areas of growth or change at EUMC.

Several weeks later, as I stepped into EUMC on my first day as the new Senior Pastor, I was struck by the beauty of the historic chapel and the warm and welcoming spirit of the people. EUMC has long been seen as the most progressive and welcoming church community in Ellensburg. Of the more than 15 churches in town, EUMC remains the first and only church to employ a female senior pastor, the first church to develop a cold weather homeless shelter, the only church that houses a legal aid service for immigrants, and one of only two congregations in our county that fully welcomes and affirms LGBTQ+ individuals. EUMC has been a beacon of social justice in Ellensburg for decades.

In the 1990s, EUMC decided to begin advocating for LGBTQ+ individuals. They went through a congregational discernment process and became a church that affirms LGBTQ+ individuals. This means that LGBTQ+ individuals can be ordained and married at EUMC. In small conservative Ellensburg, this decision caused EUMC to be seen as the “liberal” church in town, and after hosting several same-sex weddings in the church over the next several years, people even began referring to EUMC more derogatorily as “the gay church.” While the goal of this reconciling process was to

provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals to worship and be a part of a faith community, from a public perception the results were partly negative and led to a rapid decline in weekly attendance. Several current members recall how this shift towards inclusion caused several conservative families to leave the church. In fact, within 10 years of becoming an affirming church, EUMC had lost over 30% of its members and in 2007 was almost forced to close its doors.¹⁴

The congregation numbered less than 50 people in the late 2000s, and these committed members were forced to examine if they wanted to invest in rebuilding the church or shutting the doors for good. Several members who were present during this time remember attending meetings with the regional Bishop, to discuss their options for the future of the church. While the process was challenging, many people recall an unwavering commitment from almost all of those 50 members to keep the doors open and to invest in a new future. This rebuilding process has been a slow growth, and to add an additional challenge, since 2010, the year the church decided to remain open, EUMC has been led by three different pastors. While this constant transition in leadership, as well as a lack of young families and college students, has made it difficult to craft and maintain a fresh vision for growth and development, church members have not stopped trying new things. For instance, five years ago the church opened a clothing center for people in our community in need of basic essentials. This provided church members opportunities to volunteer together and the clothing center has since become a visible asset to Ellensburg.

¹⁴ This information was drawn from attendance records and from conversations with several members of EUMC who were present during this reconciling process who noted the decision to become a reconciling congregation as the primary cause of this drop-in attendance.

Also, since 2010 EUMC has hosted community events throughout the year to build relationships with other community organizations. This has led to the development of new partnerships but little to no growth in regular church attendance. Unfortunately, despite their efforts to increase their community engagement, EUMC has yet to see the kind of growth they've been hoping for over the past ten years.

Today, EUMC is at a crossroads. In spite of our slow growth in recent years, over 80% of our church members are over the age of 60. On our current trajectory, as our members grow older and become unable to attend or participate in church life, our relevance and influence in this community will diminish. We now face the challenge of reinventing ourselves in an effort to engage a younger generation of churchgoers, insuring a healthy future for our church. An added challenge is the possible division in the United Methodist Church denomination over the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion. We have already seen how this denominational unrest has influenced the public's impression of the UMC. As the incoming senior pastor, I knew I would be tasked with the leadership challenge of helping the congregation identify their strengths, establish a clear identity, and to ultimately craft a new strategic vision for the future of EUMC.

Over the years, other pastors and church leaders have attempted to lead EUMC through strategic planning processes, opting to start new small groups and bible studies. Several years ago, the church even agreed to introduce contemporary music into the Sunday service, which was challenging for some of the older members. Unfortunately, these efforts have not produced the type of growth that church leaders hoped for and the church has continued to age. Also, since 2010 EUMC has experienced little growth and

has seen a diminishing desire from attendees to keep these new small groups and bible studies running. In the past five years, EUMC has averaged only one regular small group for the entire church, and that group usually met once a week in the middle of the day. This time was convenient for retirees but impossible for any college students or anyone that works nine to five to attend, which hindered the church's ability to engage more young people. While church members remain hungry for this type of spiritual growth and development, there is little enthusiasm to start more groups. As our church attendance and participation has flatlined in recent years, EUMC is finding it difficult to maintain these types of classes and to create a renewed sense of excitement around implementing new programs. In fact, EUMC went through a strategic planning process 10 years ago, and through that process they learned a lot about the culture of this small church. One of the most important lessons the strategic planning team learned was that the leaders and influencers in the church were tired. I was aware of the previous strategic planning process, but I had little knowledge of how this process helped the church's development until one unusually warm evening in late April when one of my lay leaders poked her head into my office.

Sharon had attended EUMC for almost ten years, and as she stepped through my door, I could tell something was on her mind. I asked how she was feeling about this pastoral transition and our conversations about the future growth and development of EUMC. "Well, Mark," she said, "I'm excited about new vision and growth. I think we need this. But I want to caution you: our people are tired. We have spent years trying to serve this community, taking on new projects and programs, and I'm just hoping that at

the end of this process we won't just be adding another 'to do list' for our leadership council." I took a deep breath. Okay, but if we aren't going to establish new programs to reach more people, then what's the point of strategic planning, I wondered? Isn't the whole point of church planning to create new programs? I was a little discouraged after her comment, but her words forced me to reconsider my own goals for this process. There was no doubt in my mind that our church members were committed to the mission of EUMC and they had a heart for serving others. However, as she made clear, our church members were already doing so much. They were caring for our aging building, leading fundraising efforts and raising awareness for the many organizations that we supported, they were setting up and running our fellowship times, and planning countless events throughout the year. As I thought more about Sharon's comment, I knew there must be another way for our church to grow and develop without having to establish a bunch of new programs.¹⁵

The meeting with Sharon was eye-opening and allowed me to see that this strategic process would need to be unique. We would be forced to examine creative new ways to engage young people without adding lots of new things for our church members to lead and implement. During my first week on the job, I scheduled a special meeting

¹⁵ Thom Rainer, the founder and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource for church leaders and the author of several books on strategic church planning, noted in an article published in 2017 that many churches today, "have so many activities, programs, events, and services that they are wearing out their congregations." His research has shown that having too many church programs can lead to staff and congregation burnout, as well as the loss of a clear sense of purpose, among other things. Learn more here: Thom S. Rainer, "The Overcommitted Church," September 13, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/09/the-overcommitted-church/>.

with our church leadership council, a group consisting of 12 adults that act as the governing board. This team of leaders would ultimately act as a guiding light for this planning process, helping to preserve the foundational aspects of this church while also providing insight into the desires of the congregation. As a group we participated in a SWOT analysis, a method developed in the 1960s that was designed “to help organizations develop a full awareness of all the factors involved in a decision.”¹⁶ We identified the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that our church was facing. Of the various responses from our team members we identified the major issues that arose within each category and those will ultimately guide our strategic planning process:

Strengths:

- I. Our progressive Wesleyan heritage and theology which supports the full inclusion of all people and a passion for serving marginalized people
- II. An historic church building which sits in the center of town only a half mile from the CWU campus
- III. An openness and willingness to change in order to ensure the future success and growth of EUMC

Weaknesses:

¹⁶ “The first two letters in the acronym, S (strengths) and W (weaknesses), refer to internal factors, which means the resources and experience readily available to you. Opportunities and threats are considered external forces that influence and affect every company, organization and individual.” For complete description: Skye Schooly, “SWOT Analysis,” *Business News Daily*, June 23, 2019, <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4245-swot-analysis.html>.

- I. Our reputation as ‘the gay church’ in a largely conservative town
- II. An aging congregation, lack of young families and college students
- III. Lack of financial resources due to low attendance
- IV. Our building and branding need updates and a redesign

Opportunities:

- I. Our reputation as a progressive church has allowed us to engage openly with other community members and churches about divisive issues in culture and the church, which has been attractive to young people
- II. New pastor that is a Millennial and comes from an Evangelical background
- III. A new college pastor with fresh vision that has immense experience working with college students and a unique ability to connect with young people, as well as a passion for spiritual formation

Threats:

- I. Impending schism in the UMC church worldwide
- II. Community-wide bias against minority groups that attend our church
- III. An overall decline in church attendance among young people in America¹⁷

Our leadership council agreed that our church needs new vision and direction. If we want to continue to make an impact in this community, we must reinvent ourselves, making an intentional effort to engage a new generation of Christ-followers. The results

¹⁷ The results from this SWOT analysis were also included in my previously submitted project prospectus: Mark Wagner, "Doctor of Ministry Project Prospectus" (Prospectus, Boston University School of Theology, 2019).

of our SWOT analysis show a deep desire to engage young families and college students, while increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, one that is marked by a passion for social justice and theological liberalism. Additionally, we are located in a large historic building that is situated in the center of downtown, and while the building is aging it is still a source of significant rental income and a visible presence in Ellensburg. Though we face new threats, our leadership council was excited about my recent hire and a renewed vision, providing deeper insight into the strategic planning process. Also, we recently hired a new college pastor. Not only does she have many years of experience working as a college pastor, but she is also pursuing her Master of Arts degree in spiritual formation. EUMC faces many challenges as we seek to grow and adapt to a changing culture. Thankfully, we have a congregation that is willing and excited to begin this new journey, and our leadership council has identified many strengths and positive opportunities that will help to inform our strategic plan.

CHAPTER THREE: LOOKING FORWARD

In a 2014 study entitled *Making Space for Millennials*, the Barna Group introduced new ways for churches to connect with millennials. The study was promoted as “A blueprint for your culture, ministry, leadership and facilities.”¹⁸ This study was guided by one question: “How can we create transformational space for and with Millennials?”¹⁹ The results of this study were based on 30,000 interviews with Millennials that were conducted over a period of ten years, and they provide insight into what Millennials are looking for as they search for a faith community.²⁰ At the conclusion of their study, the Barna Group determined that “there are five major reasons Millennials stay connected to a Christian community:

1. Cultural discernment—engaging with the wider culture, as a faith community, to assess and respond biblically to its effects on human flourishing
2. Life-shaping relationships—consistent, long-term friendship with at least one older Christian adult who invests time and resources into their lives
3. A firsthand experience of Jesus—the confidence, through seasons of doubt and pain, that comes from having personally experienced God’s revelation in Christ
4. Reverse mentoring—being valued for the knowledge, skills and energy they can offer to older members of the community of faith

¹⁸ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials* (Nashville: Barna Group, 2014), 11.

¹⁹ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 6.

²⁰ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 6.

5. Vocational discipleship— whole-life spiritual formation that includes understanding their work as a God-given calling²¹

The research is clear: Millennials are searching for diversity, authenticity in relationships, spiritual formation, opportunities to serve, and an opportunity to engage pressing issues facing our world today. Barna’s study stands in opposition to what many churches and faith leaders have assumed about millennials, as we have seen a concerted effort on the part of thousands of churches in the past ten years try and become more “relevant” to attract this younger generation.²² Ed Stetzer, professor of mission and evangelism at Wheaton College, writes that, “being effective at reaching and keeping Millennials doesn’t have much to do with being a ‘young, cool, hip church.’ It has more to do with fostering relationships between young adults and older adults who care about them, listen to them, and, as a result, minister together with them.”²³ Many mainline churches in America now face the pressing challenge of discovering how to create such an environment, one that fosters intergenerational relationships and provides opportunities for genuine spiritual growth, attracting and retaining young people. This is

²¹ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 7.

²² There are now organizations that are solely devoted to helping churches reinvent themselves to reach this younger generation: For more information: Craig Janssen, “Design to Attract Millennials,” *Church Design*, March 6, 2018, https://church.design/cover_stories/design-to-attract-millennials/.

²³ Ed Stetzer, “How to Effectively Reach and Retain Millennials,” *Christianity Today*, September 15, 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/september/how-to-effectively-reach-and-retain-millennials.html>.

particularly true in the United Methodist Church (UMC), one of the largest mainline protestant denominations in the world.

In 2015 the UMC partnered with the Barna Group to conduct an extensive seeker survey.²⁴ This survey was developed to provide insight into why the number of millennials attending mainline protestant churches in America was dwindling and to identify the elements of a faith community that are important to these young people.

The target audience was defined as those who (1) are currently ages 18 to 34, (2) are not affiliated with the United Methodist church, (3) are not an active church goer (infrequent church attendance) OR are not committed to a church (frequent church attendance), and (4) answer 'Yes' to at least four of the following statements: Searching for meaning and purpose, something feels missing from your life, have emotional pain or frustration that you'd like to resolve, a spiritual person, seeking something better spiritually in life, on a quest for spiritual truth, want to have a difference with your life, have a passion for social justice, contribute to the common good of your community.²⁵

Interestingly, the results of this study showed that “84% of millennials value spiritual development and 71% believe church has something to offer.”²⁶ This study shows that

²⁴ Barna Group, *Seeker Study 2015, Survey* (Nashville: United Methodist Communications, 2015), 4.

²⁵ “The Seeker audience represents about one out of every three (36%) young adults under 35 years old and is drawn from a mix of religious backgrounds and experiences. In total, this represents about 20-25 million adult Americans, or about one-tenth of the adult population. The sample excludes the extremes: those most committed to their faith and to their church, as well as those who are aggressively skeptical of churches. A total of 406 online surveys were conducted among young adult Seekers to gain insight into their attitudes and spiritual needs, as well as their expectations of churches. The study used a national, random, and representative sample of young adults across the country, drawn from an online panel. Individuals on the panel were screened to identify people who met the criteria of a Seeker.” For more information: Barna Group, *Seeker Study 2015, Survey*, (Nashville: United Methodist Communications), 2015, 7.

²⁶ Tricia Brown, “Learn How to Attract Millennials to Your Church,” Resource UMC, 2018, <http://www.umcom.org/learn/how-to-attract-millennials-to-your-church>.

millennials still care about their faith development. The question is, what are they looking for in a church, and do mainline protestant churches meet these criteria? If not, what changes could be made so that mainline churches could be in a better position to reach out to millennials?

While many millennials do care about social justice, community service and vibrant worship, those are not the most important factors when considering a church. A majority of seekers who took part in this survey “say the primary motivators for attending church are spiritual growth (39%) and genuine community (38%).”²⁷ In light of these findings, many UMC churches, as well as other mainline protestant churches, are now shifting their mission and vision statements, re-aligning their outreach efforts, to focus on this younger generation in an attempt to rebuild this shrinking population. Thankfully, there are examples of mainline protestant churches that have effectively adopted fresh methods for engaging this younger generation. Diana Butler Bass is a scholar and researcher who has spent the past two decades studying mainline protestant churches in America that have shifted their focus towards reaching millennials. In her book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, Bass takes an in-depth look at how fifty mainline churches in America have re-invented themselves in an effort to engage a younger generation.

Bass’s study was based on a “three-year research project, the Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice (PCIP), funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., housed at Virginia Theological Seminary, and conducted between 2002 and 2005. The project

²⁷ Barna Group, *Seeker Study 2015, Survey*, 13.

was designed as an in-depth ethnographic investigation of vital, healthy, viable, and growing mainline Protestant congregations through field research across the United States.”²⁸ Through her study, Bass was able to identify “ten signposts of renewal” at healthy mainline churches. These signposts are more like elements of success that these churches have utilized to engage a younger generation and have begun to experience growth and vitality. The signposts Bass identified are: Hospitality, discernment, healing, contemplation, testimony, diversity, justice, worship, reflection, and beauty.²⁹ Upon examining Bass’s signposts and the findings from Barna’s study, there were four main themes that emerged. This project examines these four primary elements that millennials tend to look for in a faith community, based on a summarization of these findings.³⁰

1. Generous hospitality – This category includes opportunities to serve and lead, a spirit of openness, desire for diversity and inclusion, creating spaces for developing inter-generational relationships, and opportunities for fellowship and participation.

2. Spiritual vitality – This category would include robust spiritual practices in worship and the daily life of the congregation such as healing prayer, testimony, experiential prayer, reflection and a culture of celebration.

²⁸ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Publishing, 2006), 295.

²⁹ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 290.

³⁰ This project summarizes the findings of Bass’s study, primarily her ten signposts of renewal, and Barna’s five major reasons millennials stay connected to a Christian community, to identify four primary elements millennials look for in a church.

3. Social engagement – This category includes acts of justice and social activism, a vocal presence in the community that speaks out on behalf of marginalized people, and a commitment to local and global mission and development work.

4. Theological generosity – This includes progressive and critical theological thinking, being taught how to think and not what to think, in-depth biblical study, a desire to engage multiple perspectives and the ability to maintain and respect different opinions within the faith community

There is no simple approach to strategic church planning, and the above concepts are not a guaranteed quick fix for a church hoping to engage a younger generation. The goal of introducing these four elements (hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement, and theological generosity) is to help the local church begin a journey of discovery.

These four theories provide a diverse foundation upon which each congregation can construct their own strategic plan. The strategic plan that EUMC created is infused with these concepts as described above in hopes to address some of the primary components that millennials are searching for in a church. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will examine each of these four categories, presenting their theological foundations as well as their relationship to the Wesleyan tradition. I will also provide examples of mainline protestant churches in America that have adopted many of these concepts in their regular practice of ministry in order to engage millennials.

GENEROUS HOSPITALITY

Everyone longs for relationship, and historically the church has functioned as a conduit for the cultivation of community, opening its doors to people from all walks of life who

are searching for intimacy with God. In the age of social media and instant gratification, people are becoming more isolated and autonomous, many finding their connection through an iPhone instead of human contact. While this type of virtual connection may seem productive, studies show that finding our community online only contributes to feelings of loneliness and isolation. In a 2017 article published in *Forbes* magazine, Caroline Beaton, an award-winning freelance writer and speaker covering psychology, culture, social trends and millennial careers, elaborated on this idea of loneliness.

She wrote that

Excessive Internet use also increases feelings of loneliness because it disconnects us from the real world. Research shows that lonely people use the Internet to “feel totally absorbed online” – a state that inevitably subtracts time and energy that could otherwise be spent on social activities and building more fulfilling offline friendships.³¹

Millennials are spending their time and energy connecting with others through social media and neglecting the real-life personal connection of human relationships. Perhaps this is why the concept of hospitality and cultivating authentic community with a diverse group of people is so important to young people when searching for a church. They feel a relational void that they hope might be met in the church. Is it possible that John Wesley’s vision of building small societies committed to cultivating meaningful friendships and growing in faith together might provide a cure for this loneliness?

Millennials want to be known. They aren’t concerned with how big or modern a church is, but rather they hope to find a place where people know each other’s names and

³¹ Caroline Beaton, “Why Millennials Are Lonely,” *Forbes*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinebeaton/2017/02/09/why-millennials-are-lonely/#69d1605a7c35>.

stories. In their study, *Making Space for Millennials*, the Barna Group found that 48% of millennials wanted church to look and feel like a small group bible study, “combining the social and intellectual aspects of Christianity, while 33% chose the image of a growing flower, which implies the possibility of personal growth and for cultivating beauty.”³² Not only does this speak to a desire to be known but also a desire to serve and contribute to the shared mission of the church. Surprisingly, the results of Barna’s study indicate that Wesley’s vision directly aligns with what young people are searching for in a faith community today.

The influence of Samuel and Susanna Wesley on their son John cannot be understated. Their passion for study and their pursuit of respect and discipline in the home built the foundation for what would become a lifelong pursuit of personal and social holiness for the father of Methodism. While Samuel may have been the breadwinner, though a bit unreliable at times, Susanna was at home rearing the children, and her goal was to impress upon her children a deep desire to know God and to study the Bible. Thankfully, Susanna was no lightweight when it came to the study of scripture. In his biography of John Wesley, Francis J. McConnell notes that, “Intellectually she was a marvel.”³³ Once, when Samuel was away fulfilling his ecclesial duties in London, Susanna decided to make her theological brilliance known in the community. McConnell documents this instance:

³² Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials* (Nashville: Barna Group, 2014), 41.

³³ Francis J. McConnell, *John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), 16.

During one of Samuel's absences Mrs. Wesley called her children together on Sunday evenings for religious instruction, consisting chiefly of the reading of such fine religious literature as her exquisite taste might select. Then a few neighbors asked permission to come in, and then more, till finally the Rectory was, at every meeting, overcrowded.³⁴

Susanna's passion for religious study and instruction inspired her to open the Wesley home to the community, creating a welcoming space for any individual who was interested in growing in their knowledge of God. These gatherings for religious instruction were not isolated incidents, as the Wesleys were often hosting meetings in their home. One thing was always true of these meetings: all were welcome. This generous hospitality made a significant impact on young John Wesley and would subsequently influence the future structure and development of the Methodist church.

In his book, *Why I Am a United Methodist*, William H. Willimon writes about Wesley's vision for the church: "As Mr. Wesley discovered, the church, no matter how big it becomes, is still primarily a face-to-face meeting of friends who know and care about one another."³⁵ The concept of hospitality runs deep throughout the history of the Methodist tradition. In fact, Wesley never aspired to founding his own denomination. He was raised in the Church of England and died believing that his Methodist clubs would merely function under the umbrella of his English tradition. Wesley's goal was to

³⁴ McConnell, *John Wesley*, 19.

³⁵ Dr. Willimon is widely regarded as a foremost authority on the life and ministry of John Wesley, as well as the foundations of Methodism. He currently serves as a Bishop in the United Methodist Church and Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School. Willimon has authored 70 books. Learn more: William H. Willimon, *Why I Am A United Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 112.

develop small class meetings, led by his itinerant preachers, for the sake of providing individuals with a safe space where they could be intimately known and where they could grow together with their peers in their knowledge and experience of God. This is, in essence, the meaning of generous hospitality in the church, creating safe spaces where people can be authentic, ask questions and grow together. We see examples of this throughout the New Testament. Jesus and his disciples, as well as Paul and other teachers are constantly meeting with small groups of people in order to foster relationships and share God's truth.

Perhaps one of Jesus' clearest teaching on hospitality can be found in Luke 14:13-14 (New Revised Standard Version). Jesus instructs the Pharisees regarding the practice of generous hospitality as the practice of building relationships expecting nothing in return: "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Jesus instructs the religious leaders to invite those who often go uninvited, and he challenges them to focus less on what they can gain and more on what they can give; primarily giving of themselves. As noted in the Wesley Study Bible commentary on this passage: "...if anyone wants to be friends with God, extend hospitality to the marginalized. Jesus rejects the notion that we are to only give hospitality to those who were able to return hospitality and demands that his followers give hospitality to those who cannot repay it."³⁶ Christ constantly models for us this

³⁶ Joel B. Green, and William H. Willimon, ed., *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 1265.

purest form of hospitality, which is the offering of ourselves and the gift of friendship to all people, especially those people who are different than us.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminds first-century Jewish Christians to, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it,” (Hebrews 13:1-2, NRSV). The Greek word that we translate as hospitality is *philoxenia*. The literal definition of this word is “love of strangers.”³⁷ Entertaining and loving strangers is core to the gospel message. The Apostle Paul reminds the church at Ephesus that they “...are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone,” (Ephesians 2:19-20, NRSV). Paul reminds us that we have been welcomed into the folds of God’s loving grace and ultimately into kinship with Christ. The church must reclaim this commitment to hospitality in order to effectively engage a younger generation. The question is how?

In her book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, Diana Butler Bass reflects on an experience she had while visiting Cornerstone United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Naples, FL, with her family. They enjoyed the service and afterwards were invited to lunch by the pastor, Roy, and several leaders in the church.

Bass reflects on this experience:

Crowded around a large table, the adults shared stories about their spiritual journeys and their excitement about Cornerstone. I hoped that my seven-year-old,

³⁷ Bible Hub, “Philoxenia,” Translations, last Modified 2019, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5381.htm>.

Emma, was not too bored. In the midst of their marvelous hospitality, with its energetic conversation and laughter, I noticed that Roy's teenage daughter, Emily, was talking to Emma.³⁸

Several months later, Bass asked her daughter Emma which church she enjoyed the most among the many they visited as a family. Emma reflected back on her time at Cornerstone and remarked, "Roy's church. I loved the rock music and Emily was really cool. She was nice to me."³⁹ Emma was impacted by her new friendship with Emily, and Emily was intentional about getting to know this little girl who was visiting her church for the first time. Through this experience at CUMC, Bass concludes that "through hospitality, Christians imitate God's welcome. Therefore, hospitality is not a program, not a single hour or ministry in the life of a congregation...hospitality is a radically biblical and democratic practice that opens the way for all people to be the same under God, part of the same family, welcome for who they are in all their uniqueness."⁴⁰ Churches that seek to engage the next generation of Christ-followers must seek to create this type of culture, where every person feels welcome and can live fully into who they are and not who the church thinks they should be.

Cultivating generous hospitality means being intentional about creating spaces, whether on Sunday mornings or during weeknight Bible studies where people feel known and where there is a greater emphasis placed on building relationships than on developing

³⁸ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 80.

³⁹ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 81.

⁴⁰ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 82.

programs. Pastors and parishioners alike must be intentional about learning names and inviting new faces in the church to get involved. More importantly, we must build a culture where every person finds support in his or her own journey towards becoming their true self, welcoming them into community just as they are and not how we think they should be. Hospitality is about knowing and appreciating each person for their uniqueness and extending an ongoing invitation for them to share their gifts in the church.

In a recent interview with World Vision, Jefferson Bethke, well-known Christian author and speaker, describes the loneliness and disconnectedness that many millennials are experiencing today. Bethke has spent years trying to uncover new ways to foster genuine community among millennials in the church, and he believes the best way for churches to engage millennials is by seeking to provide this type of generous hospitality every week. He explains that he would, “love to see people return to more of a hyper-relational discipleship. Bringing people into adjoining rhythms.”⁴¹ He acknowledges a greater need for churches to work hard to learn names and for older church members to invite young people into their lives, building lasting mentor/mentee relationships. In other words, the role of the church is to create free spaces where people of all ages can connect with God and one another.

SPIRITUAL VITALITY

⁴¹ Barna Group, *The Connected Generation*, 54.

In a joint study published by the United Methodist Church and the BARNA Group entitled UMC Seeker Survey, researchers found that “spiritual growth and genuine community are the primary motivators to attend church. In fact, 39% of the millennials surveyed noted that one of the reasons they would choose to attend a church is if that church helped them in their personal spiritual development.”⁴² The study shows that millennials are searching for a faith community that provides clear opportunities for spiritual growth. Another study conducted by the Barna Group found that 44% of millennials surveyed “say they attend church to be closer to God and nearly three in 10 go to learn more about God (27%).”⁴³ The primary practices they are searching for in their church experience that they believe will help them grow closer to God are meaningful worship, prayer and solid Biblical teaching.⁴⁴ While every church hopes to cultivate meaningful worship and prayer, and offer Biblically-based teaching, there may be ways to increase the effectiveness of these regular spiritual practices.

The goal of our spiritual practice is sanctification or maturing in our faith in God and aligning our whole selves with God’s will. Prayer is an essential element of this transformative process and if we hope to progress on our spiritual journey, an important task for Christ-followers is to discover how to pray. Thomas Merton, American Trappist monk and theologian once wrote that, “Prayer is then not just a formula of words, or a

⁴² Barna Group, *Seeker Study 2015, Survey*, 17.

⁴³ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 41.

⁴⁴ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 41.

series of desires springing up in the heart – it is the orientation of our whole body, mind and spirit to God in silence, attention and adoration. All good meditative prayer is a conversion of our entire self to God.”⁴⁵ This type of spiritual experience was central to the life and ministry of John Wesley.

On May 24, 1738, as John Wesley sat in a meeting at Aldersgate, London, listening intently as someone read Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, he had a personal conversion experience that would transform his life and ultimately lay the foundations for the Methodist movement. He recorded this event in his journal: “I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death.”⁴⁶ This transformational experience would set the trajectory for Wesley’s lifelong pursuit of discovering how to not only possess faith in Christ but how to practice and grow in his spiritual pursuit of holiness. God’s gracious invitation to us to pursue and attain personal and communal holiness would come to be known in the Wesleyan tradition as sanctifying grace.

According the United Methodist Book of Discipline, “one of the foundational elements of the Wesleyan tradition is the notion of grace: Grace pervades our understanding of the Christian faith and life. By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy

⁴⁵ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux Publishing, 1999), 41.

⁴⁶ McConnell, *John Wesley*, 57.

Spirit.”⁴⁷ Wesley concluded that there were three different types of grace: prevenient grace, justifying grace and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace encompasses God’s eternal action before, during and after our human existence, while justifying grace is primarily understood as God’s work of redemption in our lives. The ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in our lives, drawing us closer to God’s heart and towards holiness is called sanctifying grace. William Willimon explains that “By the gracious disciplining of our lives to God, our lives are healed and made truer to God’s originating intentions for us.”⁴⁸ Thus, by our own efforts to practice spirituality, we become more aligned with God’s will and experience a deeper connection with the Divine. Wesley took this idea of sanctification one step further when he coined the term ‘spiritual respiration.’ Spiritual respiration was Wesley’s belief that individuals might attain personal spiritual perfection by God’s sanctifying grace through constant connection with God’s spirit. Much like humans rely on the act of breathing, we must continually breathe in the power of God’s spirit. In one famous sermon, Wesley explained this concept of our spiritual connection and reliance upon God further:

God is continually breathing, as it were, upon the soul; and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart; and prayer and praise ascending to heaven: And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul

⁴⁷ L. Fitzgerald Reist, ed., *2016 United Methodist Church Book of Discipline* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 51.

⁴⁸ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe: The Core of Wesleyan Faith and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 61.

is sustained; and the child of God grows up, till he comes to the “full measure of the stature of Christ.”⁴⁹

We cannot survive apart from our ability to breathe, and “we must breathe God in order to live spiritually.”⁵⁰ In Psalm 139:7-10 King David writes about this inescapable God as one that is ever-present and always working within and among us:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast, (Psalm 139:7-10, NRSV).

David describes God as always present, always leading him and protecting him. Wesley believed that in order to fully experience God’s present we must practice ordinary means of grace, constantly align ourselves with God’s spirit through prayer, meditation, small groups, Bible study, the eucharist, worship, and reflection to help us maintain this connection. Through these spiritual disciplines, we have the ability to connect with God’s presence, offering our supplications and thanksgivings as Paul instructs us in his letter to young Timothy.⁵¹ Prayer is a form of connection with God and provides an opportunity for us to sit in silence in the presence of the Holy Spirit as we are gently conformed to the likeness of Christ. By God’s grace we have the ability to reflect on all

⁴⁹ Michael Anderson, “The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 45,” *Wesley Center Online*, last modified 1999, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-45-the-new-birth/>.

⁵⁰ Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, eds, *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 753.

⁵¹ See 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NRSV).

that God has done and continues to do in our lives and in the world. In our worship, and as we seek to serve God, we are responding to God's grace in our lives and celebrating God's presence. Through our regular spiritual practice our wants and desires become more aligned with God's will which is the essence of sanctification. Mainline churches today must explore ways to foster environments where people can be still and align their hearts and minds to God's spirit.

Graham Standish is the pastor of Calvin Presbyterian Church. He believes that "the foundation for a spiritual church is prayer."⁵² Standish has led his church into a deeper appreciation for spiritual formation and through the regular practice of prayer as a congregation. Graham believes "that spiritual renewal started not with big programming but with listening to God's word, meditating on scripture, and discerning God's will."⁵³ Calvin has introduced more time for reflection and meditation in their service, the foundation of which is a time of silence which "serves as spiritual white space between the words, allowing each person to hear the word within."⁵⁴ This introduction of space and solitude into the regular practice of worship has transformed the spiritual experience for members of Calvin. Additionally, Standish and his leadership team were not seeking to establish new programs for spiritual formation, they were merely introducing elements of spiritual practice into their regular worship experience. While there seems to be no

⁵² Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 124.

⁵³ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 124.

⁵⁴ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 125.

empirical evidence to support the notion that churches like Calvin who are introducing more spiritual practices into their regular time of worship are seeing more young people in attendance, according to a 2019 study conducted by Barna, one of the primary reasons millennials are attending church is to discover a deeper spirituality.⁵⁵

In 2018 the Barna Group began interviewing more than 15,000 millennials from 25 different countries around the world. They hoped to learn more about how millennials view the church, and more broadly religion as a whole. One of the overarching themes is that millennials do believe in a spiritual world. In fact, “more than four in five millennials respondents from more religious cultures express openness to believing in spiritual forces.”⁵⁶ While this belief does not always translate to increased participation in a faith community, studies confirm that millennials are interested in exploring and growing in their spirituality. Churches like Calvin have made a commitment to introducing new methods of spiritual practice for the purpose of fostering growth among attendees. This growing interest among millennials in spirituality would suggest that if churches were willing to explore new ways of fostering spiritual growth, young people might be more inclined to participate.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Rabbi Joshua Stanton, in an article written for the *Huffington Post*, claims that “millennials are a generation overwhelmingly dedicated to social justice. Where there is injustice, we want to respond, whether in-person, online, or through power of the purse

⁵⁵ Barna Group, *The Connected Generation*, 14.

⁵⁶ Barna Group, *The Connected Generation*, 59.

— even when it is that of a teenager who gives what little he can.”⁵⁷ This is evidenced in the fact that millennials are one of the most progressive and socially active generations in the history of America. They are passionate about equality, and they are outspoken on issues of race and LGBTQ+ inclusion. The most recent *Millennial Impact Report* showed that “Overwhelmingly, millennials in our studies are interested in causes/social issues relevant to quality of life for everyone, including, as a matter of course, people who historically have been marginalized or disenfranchised.”⁵⁸ Undeniably, when given the choice, millennials are more likely to align themselves with a church that is passionate about justice and equality. Moreover, studies show that millennials are searching for faith communities where they might find opportunities to serve and lead in the movement to promote justice in their local communities. The idea that we might be able to practice holiness, imitating the life and ministry of Christ, was central to Wesley’s theology and one signpost of a modern flourishing faith community.

Central to Wesleyan theology is the concept of social holiness. Social holiness revolved around the notion that our role as Christ-followers was not only to pursue personal sanctification and holiness but also to work towards the sanctification of society. Willimon writes that, “United Methodists believe that Christ calls us to witness to our

⁵⁷ Rabbi Joshua Stanton, “Social Justice in the Millennial Generation,” *Huffington Post*, April 19, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/social-justice-in-the-mil_b_2708224.

⁵⁸ The Millennial Impact Project is the largest body of data and analysis on how US millennials interact with causes. Since beginning the study in 2009, Achieve has researched the behavior and preferences of more than 150,000 millennials (born 1980-2000) through surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Learn more here: “The Millennial Impact Report,” The Millennial Impact Report, last modified 2017, <http://www.themillennialimpact.com/>.

faith in every area of our lives. There is no realm of human endeavor – economic, political, sexual, social, educational – which is immune to the light of Christ.”⁵⁹ Wesley modeled this activism in his own life and ministry. Not only did he advocate for economic equality in England, but he was also a vocal critic of slavery and wrote in support of the abolitionist movement. In fact, six days before his death, John Wesley wrote a letter to William Wilberforce, lending his support and encouraging Wilberforce to keep fighting for the abolition of slavery. Wesley believed that God’s desire was to reconcile us to Godself and also that individuals might be reconciled to one another in society.

In 1908, the Methodist Episcopal Church, an antecedent denomination of the UMC, sought to formally recognize the pursuit of social holiness in the formation and development of the greater denomination by drafting the United Methodist Social Creed. The most recent version of this creed is included in the 2016 UMC *Book of Discipline* and establishes that United Methodists will forever “dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.”⁶⁰ The creed is the final addition to the much longer description of the UMC social principles which outline the theological and practical views of the denomination to offer guidance to local churches on how to address issues like abortion, homosexuality and economic equality. The final portion of the creed states,

⁵⁹ William H. Willimon, *Why I Am A United Methodist*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 70.

⁶⁰ L. Fitzgerald Reist, ed., *2016 United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, 166.

“We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.”⁶¹ The pursuit of social holiness is not only central to United Methodism but to the whole of the Christian scriptures as well.

In the book of James, we read that, “Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead,” (James 2:26, NRSV). The author of this New Testament letter goes on to define religion as the task of “caring for orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself unstained by the world,” (James 1:27, NRSV). James offers what may be one of the clearest arguments for the marriage of faith and works in all of scripture. His teaching is built upon Jesus’ own life and ministry that was focused on caring for the poor and building relationships with those standing on the margins of society. In Matthew 25 Jesus describes the final judgment as the separation of the sheep and the goats.

In his illustration the king commends the sheep on his right and insures them that

they are blessed by my Father and will inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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 25:34-36, NRSV).

Jesus’ words here indicate that the conditions for our salvation will revolve around our willingness to serve the marginalized and oppressed people of society, advocating for the poor and the prisoners. The pursuit of social holiness, building bridges

⁶¹ L. Fitzgerald Reist, ed., *2016 United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, 166.

of peace between the rich and poor and working towards wholeness in society, is the essence of Christ's mission in the world as declared by the apostle Paul that "through Christ God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross," (Colossians 1:20, NRSV). The role of Christ's followers is to actively participate in God's work of redemption in the world. The question is: how can churches today reclaim the pursuit of social holiness and provide opportunities for young people to engage in the work of bringing God's justice to our communities?

Cornerstone United Methodist Church is committed to doing justice in their community and in the world. Pastor Roy Terry promotes their passion for justice regularly, but during the month of January he introduces new elements to his sermon that help inspire the congregation and remind them of the centrality of social justice to the Christian life. Pastor Terry understands that liturgy largely shapes a congregation's theology, and he seeks to be intentional about crafting sermons and choosing prayers and songs that speak to Cornerstone's passion for justice. On one particular Sunday, "instead of a traditional sermon, Roy offers reflections on how Martin Luther King 'is key to Cornerstone's theology and identity.' To underscore the centrality of King's vision, Roy incorporates other elements into the service like traditional African American hymns, prayers and other readings that focus on social justice."⁶² Roy is intentional about crafting this liturgy of justice in an effort to remind the congregation of Cornerstone just

⁶² Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 158.

how important taking an active stand against injustice is for Christ-followers and for the church.

Introducing a liturgy of justice has allowed Roy and Cornerstone UMC to annually refocus on their pursuit of social holiness through the regular practice of worship. Cornerstone's commitment to social justice does not stop on Sunday mornings. They have also taken an active role in promoting justice in their community by helping to launch a special worship service for refugees and immigrants and offering classes for the public on ways to become socially and politically active. Cornerstone truly "embraces the Methodist ideal of 'social holiness,' that 'God does have something to say about the way we treat the world, our neighbors, those different from ourselves, nations, our environment, and our ruling authorities.'"⁶³ They seek to remain faithful to Christ's charge to care for all people and put their faith into action, and this is one quality that millennials are searching for in a faith community.

Many churches are committed to the pursuit of justice and the challenge they face is discovering how to invite young people to participate in this work. According to a recent article published by The Unstuck Group, a national team of ministry professionals committed to helping churches develop a vision for their futures, millennials do "want to see action. Just talking about making a difference is meaningless to millennials. They want to be part of a church that is doing things that are valuable, visible, and memorable.

⁶³ Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 161.

They want to see words put into action.”⁶⁴ Not only do young people believe that social justice is important, they believe it’s largely the role of the church to engage in this important work. Churches must now get creative in order to discover new ways to promote their justice work and invite new visitors to participate. If faith communities want to engage millennials, they must get serious about bringing God’s justice to the world and be clear about how they are achieving this mission.

THEOLOGICAL GENEROSITY

According to a 2015 study conducted by the Barna Group in partnership with the United Methodist Church, critical theological thinking is a top quality that millennials are looking for in a church. The study showed that millennials “are looking for enjoyable, insightful and meaningful sermons that are practical and actionable in their lives, and they’re searching for truth, so they want to hear facts, reason and evidence without people telling them what to think, but rather how to think. Millennials want to hear how the Scripture applies to tough subjects; how it applies to their lives.”⁶⁵ The challenge pastors face today is discovering new ways of presenting theological concepts and ideas about God that go below the surface. Millennials aren’t looking for taglines and catchy slogans. They are searching for answers to life’s big questions and they are curious how

⁶⁴ Mitch Nelson, “Millennials and Social Justice,” The Unstuck Group, June 4, 2015, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2015/06/millennials-and-social-justice-insights/>.

⁶⁵ In general, this study found that the primary factors motivating millennials to attend church are to find help with their spiritual development and to have an opportunity to find out more about God. Learn more: Tricia Brown, “Learn How to Attract Millennials to Your Church,” Resource UMC, 2018, <http://www.umcom.org/learn/how-to-attract-millennials-to-your-church>.

faith in God might help them discover their purpose in this life. In order to effectively engage millennials on a Sunday morning or at a weekly Bible study, church leaders must begin to explore the intersection of faith and culture, introducing millennials to critical theological thinking.

Thom S. Rainer is the founder and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource for church leaders. He has spent over 20 years walking alongside churches as they seek to grow and develop. In a 2015 article, Rainer wrote, “In recent years I have noticed a remarkable—and welcomed—return by younger leaders to the fundamentals of the faith, basic theological education, and the deepening of doctrinal roots.”⁶⁶ He believes millennials are searching for churches that offer a deeper level of theological exploration. Whether on Sunday mornings or through weeknight bible studies, Rainer has seen that young people have a desire to increase their biblical knowledge and understanding of who God is and what difference God makes in their lives. Thankfully, the commitment to critical theological study is foundational to most mainline protestant denominations, especially the United Methodist Church. John Wesley was a staunch advocate for continued theological training as he himself had multiple degrees and was passionate about not only his own education but the education of his clergy as well.

⁶⁶ Thom S. Rainer, “Six Ways Millennials Are Educating Their Churches Theologically,” April 15, 2015, <https://thomrainer.com/2015/04/six-ways-millennials-are-educating-their-churches-theologically/>.

Wesley was a graduate of Oxford University, ultimately earning a Master of Arts in Divinity. He published countless articles, various treatises on theological topics, and he even wrote a book, *Primitive Physick*, that focused on natural health remedies. Wesley studied physical science, psychology and biology, but despite his knowledge on a wide range of topics, he often “boasted of being a ‘man of one book.’ Wesley read the Bible in the original languages, showing a deep knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek.”⁶⁷ Throughout his life, Wesley never abandoned his passion for education, and this passion would ultimately become central to the Methodist movement. William Willimon notes that “From the beginning Wesley insisted that his preachers be educated, in spite of whatever formal educational limitations they may have, by being steeped in the Bible, constantly growing through constant interaction with the sacred text.”⁶⁸ His justification for calling preachers to such high standards was his belief that “the gospel calls for faithfully formed and well-educated preachers who will guide the church toward God and holiness of heart and life.”⁶⁹ Not only was he passionate about educating his preachers, but Wesley also believed in making theological training available to the entire congregation.

John Wesley was committed to preaching the Gospel to all people and this mission included equipping parishioners to engage in their own theological study.

⁶⁷ Willimon, *This We Believe*, 67.

⁶⁸ Willimon, *This We Believe*, 67.

⁶⁹ Green and Willimon, ed., *The Wesley Study Bible*, 997.

Through his extensive travels, and as he trained and sent more clergy into various communities, thousands of people were impacted by this newfound tradition. His passion for Christian discipleship included disciplined theological study. As Willimon notes, “The sure knowledge of God’s discipline through the means of grace characterized Wesley’s vision to educate children, support day schools in London and Kingswood, establish class meetings and societies, and publish written resources for Methodist homes.”⁷⁰ As he established more class meetings and small societies, Wesley took his role as a pastor more seriously, supporting and encouraging individuals to grow in their own faith practice and knowledge of God. In his biography of John Wesley, Francis J. McConnell asserts that, “What Wesley achieved in this close intimacy with his people was to put into their hands tools for the development of, and expression of, and work of the religious life.”⁷¹ Wesley created a model for future generations of Methodist clergy to go forth and equip the Saints, imparting his incessant devotion to study and the Christian’s responsibility to practice piety. Wesley did not believe the Christian journey was only about having faith in God. He was convinced that our role as followers of Christ was to study the history and doctrine of Christianity and he sought to create more opportunities for parishioners to think critically about God.

⁷⁰ Green and Willimon, ed., *The Wesley Study Bible*, 1471.

⁷¹ McConnell goes on to note that “One of the farthest-reaching outcomes of Wesley’s work was the setting of thousands upon thousands of men and women to systematically doing of what they were profoundly convinced was the will of God.” Learn more: McConnell, *John Wesley*, 118.

True to his Anglican roots and throughout his early life, John Wesley embraced a method of theological exploration that considered three main factors: scripture, reason and tradition. In order to form his own understanding of who God was, Wesley did not solely rely on the biblical text. He would also investigate the church's views on certain topics as well as consider his own hypothesis. After his Aldersgate conversion experience, Wesley introduced a fourth factor into his process of theological inquiry: experience. This four-fold approach to the study of theology was dubbed the Wesleyan Quadrilateral by mid-twentieth century theologians, and this method remains foundational to United Methodist Churches today. The development of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral demonstrates Wesley's commitment to deep theological exploration and his unwillingness to settle for the narrower Sola Scriptura which was introduced by Martin Luther as an effort to elevate the written biblical text as the primary revelation of God. This is how the UMC defines the quadrilateral today:

I. Scripture

In thinking about our faith, we put primary reliance on the Bible. It is the unique testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life of Israel; in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; and in the Spirit's work in the early church. It is our sacred canon and, thus, the decisive source of our Christian witness and the authoritative measure of the truth in our beliefs.

II. Tradition

Between the New Testament age and our own era stand countless witnesses on whom we rely in our theological journey. Through their words in creed, hymn, discourse, and prayer, through their music and art, through their courageous deeds, we discover Christian insight by which our study of the Bible is illuminated.

III. Experience

A third source and criterion of our theology is our experience. By experience we mean especially the "new life in Christ," which is ours as a gift of God's grace; such rebirth and personal assurance gives us new eyes to see the living truth in Scripture. But we mean also the broader experience of all the life we live, its joys,

its hurts, its yearnings. So, we interpret the Bible in light of our cumulative experiences.

IV. Reason

Finally, our own careful use of reason, though not exactly a direct source of Christian belief, is a necessary tool. We use our reason in reading and interpreting the Scripture. We use it in relating the Scripture and tradition to our experience and in organizing our theological witness in a way that's internally coherent. We use our reason in relating our beliefs to the full range of human knowledge and in expressing our faith to others in clear and appealing ways.⁷²

While Wesley may not have been considered a liberal theologian during his lifetime, his theology has many progressive ramifications for church renewal today. His commitment to the pursuit of intellectual and experiential integrity in his theological study are concepts that are also deeply rooted in scripture. Dr. Charles Scalise, professor of church history at Fuller Theological Seminary, describes theological study as “loving God with all of our minds.”⁷³ In other words, in order to know and understand God we must approach our study of scripture, history, culture, and our experience of God's spirit with a critical lens. We are always learning new things, and in order to grow in our knowledge of God, which Christ himself exclaims is the essence of eternal life, we must exercise our brains.⁷⁴ While Christ's words refer primarily to a relational knowing, we must also cultivate a cognitive knowledge of God and Christ. The first Christian church, whose journey is recounted in the book of Acts, recognized the importance of theological

⁷² United Methodist Church, “Theological Guidelines,” United Methodist Church, September 5, 2019, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/theological-guidelines>.

⁷³ Dr. Charles Scalise, “Church History” (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Seattle, WA, 2011).

⁷⁴ See John 17:3 (NRSV).

study in the regular life of the church: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers,” (Acts 2:42, NRSV). Luke was writing this before the Bible as we now know it existed, and most scholars believe he was making reference to the teaching of Jesus’ closest disciples. They were sharing with others the things they were taught by Christ and several of them would ultimately pen written accounts of their experiences. These are the written accounts that we possess today, through which we can continue to study and understand the apostles’ experience and the teaching of Christ.

Later in the New Testament Paul wrote to help guide the young churches as they established a solid doctrinal foundation and sought to evangelize neighboring communities throughout the Mediterranean. Paul was an expert in the Jewish law and the Jewish scriptures, and while he was writing to promote a new kind of religion, one that was built upon faith and not law, he did not neglect his passion for theological training. In his second letter to the young Reverend Timothy, Paul writes:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work, (2 Timothy 3:14-17, NRSV).

Paul’s message to Timothy was clear: never stop learning. The truth is, we can never know the fullness of who God is and our journey of gaining knowledge and understanding will last a lifetime. The challenge is discovering new ways to promote this type of theological exploration in our churches.

Rainer notes six creative ways that millennial leaders are helping churches foster a culture that promotes critical thinking:

1. Emphasizing the big story of the Bible. Millennial leaders understand the need for Christians to be grounded in the grand narrative of Scripture, and the resources they use range from chronological Bible reading plans to theologically robust kids' Bibles.
2. Utilizing a catechism-like resource with their kids. Millennial parents are using other resources and even smartphone apps to teach theological concepts and lessons to their children at home. While they aren't typically formal catechisms, they emphasize building a foundation of correct answers to Biblical questions.
3. Study groups working through systematic theology. I know of several churches that have weekly study groups who cover basic systematic theology. This is not just donuts and devotions. These groups intensely study Scripture and theology and in many cases have seen an increase in theological education and evangelistic fervor.
4. A return to theological hymnody and songs. Many Millennial parents are using time in the car with their children to reinforce biblical truth through song. Several musicians have responded to this trend with albums full of songs with lyrics made entirely of Scripture.
5. Recommended reading on church websites. Many churches no longer have an official library on their campus, but church leaders are still recommending books. Many church websites now include a "recommended reading" section that features a mix of devotional classics, theological books, and the resources that have been most helpful to the pastor and staff.
6. Church membership classes. The two main things you should communicate in church membership classes are information and expectations. And both of those must be firmly built on a biblical foundation of good theology.⁷⁵

While this is not an exhaustive list, Rainer has provided six creative approaches to cultivating an inquisitive environment. His suggestions go beyond the regular worship experience which includes thoughtful sermons and catchy songs. He notes the unique ways that young leaders are encouraging and equipping others in their faith communities

⁷⁵ Thom S. Rainer, "Six Ways Millennials Are Educating Their Churches Theologically," Thom S. Rainer, April 15, 2015, <https://thomrainer.com/2015/04/six-ways-millennials-are-educating-their-churches-theologically/>.

to embrace more scholarly approaches to the Christian faith. For churches who hope to engage more young people, they must begin to create opportunities for people to think critically about scripture and faith. Moreover, church leaders must embrace the reality that millennials are no longer satisfied with being told what to believe, they are more concerned with discovering how to believe. Specifically, they hope to learn how to reconcile the harsh realities of life with their faith in God.

Recently, the Public Religion Research Institute upheld the notion that one of the primary reasons millennials are leaving church is because of the “tense relationship between Christianity and science.”⁷⁶ Millennials hope to find ways to reconcile their faith in God with a world facing many challenges like climate change and an evolving understanding of human sexuality. In order for churches to effectively reach millennials we must no longer be afraid to engage in conversations about these controversial topics, and we must embrace the truth that God is the creator of all things, including science. Perhaps one-way church leaders could help relieve the tension between Christianity and science, thereby engaging the millennial audience, is by promoting the truth that the Bible simply does not answer all of our questions regarding the evolution of humanity and that faith in God requires a certain comfort with uncertainty and the ability to embrace mystery.

⁷⁶ Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, “Millennials Leave Their Churches Over Science,” PRRI, October 6, 2011, <https://www.ppri.org/spotlight/millennials-leave-their-churches-over-science-lesbian-gay-issues/>.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIC PLANNING AT EUMC

The writer of Proverbs declares that, “Where there is no vision, the people get out of control, but whoever obeys instruction is happy,” (Proverbs 29:18, CEB). In other words, if we aren’t sure where we are going, we will never know when we arrive, nor will we grasp how to get there. Maintaining a clear vision is crucial for any organization, especially the church. Brian Zehr is the author of *The Seven Critical Components to Lead with Confidence* and cofounder of Intentional Impact, an organization committed to helping churches in America thrive. In a recent lecture, Zehr noted how important it is for churches to develop a clear vision. He said churches who want to grow sustainably must be able to answer three primary questions: Who are we? Where are we going? How will we get there?⁷⁷ Through his work with local churches, Zehr maintains the importance of embracing values and allowing our values to shape our vision. An important part of Zehr’s process is identifying a clear leader who will help guide the team through the process of discovering their values and designing a strategy that will allow the church to fulfill the new vision. As the senior pastor, my task would ultimately be to provide resources and support to my team members as they uncover the values of our church, guiding our process towards new vision and direction. While there are many methods for developing a strategic vision and plan, our church council decided to utilize

⁷⁷ Brian Zehr, “Multiplying Ministries” (lecture, United Methodist Church, Des Moines, WA, 2019).

Aubrey Malphur's book *Advanced Strategic Planning* to help guide our planning process.⁷⁸

Malphurs defines strategic planning as “the fourfold process that a point leader, such as a pastor, works regularly with a team of leaders to envision or re-envision and revitalize his/her church by developing a biblical mission and a compelling vision, discovering its core values, and crafting a strategy that implements a unique, authentic church model.”⁷⁹ The four concepts that make up the strategic planning process are:

- I. Development of the Mission
- II. Development of the Vision
- III. Discovery of the Core Values
- IV. Design of the Strategy
 - a. Outreach into the Community
 - b. Making Disciples
 - c. Building the Team
 - d. Assessing the Setting
 - e. Raising Finances⁸⁰

Malphur's model for advanced strategic church planning is effective because his process is built upon the foundations of transformational leadership theory as proposed by James MacGregor Burns.

In his groundbreaking book, *Leadership*, Dr. James MacGregor Burns draws the distinction between transactional leadership and transformational leadership.

⁷⁸ While our council chose Malphur's book to guide our process, we did not utilize his entire proposed strategy or all of the resources he provided. His book provided the basic structure and timeline of our strategic planning process.

⁷⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 28.

⁸⁰ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 30.

Burns defines transformational leadership as

leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers’ values and motivations.⁸¹

According to Burns, the crux of great leadership lies in the leader’s ability to guide their followers through the process of defining their shared purpose and ultimately developing strategies to reach their collective goals. He goes on to write that “transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”⁸²

The theme of the transformational leadership process could be understood as synergy, or leaders and followers moving in the same direction towards a common goal. This common goal should be informed by the shared values and motivations, as collectively defined by the leader and their followers. Burns offers the example of Ghandi, whom he credits as one of the best modern examples of a transforming leader. Ghandi “aroused and elevated the hopes of and demands of millions of Indians, enhancing their lives and personalities in the process.”⁸³ Thus, a transformational leader is not focused on the acquisition of power but on guiding their followers through the process of discovering their goals, based on their shared values, and by leading the team as they develop practical methods and strategies to reach these goals.

⁸¹ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper Perennial Publishing, 1978), 19.

⁸² Burns, *Leadership*, 20.

⁸³ Burns, *Leadership*, 20.

SECTION 4.1: THE PLANNING PROCESS

As the pastor of EUMC, I was chosen to serve as the point leader in our strategic planning process. My first step in developing a strategic plan was to identify a strategic planning team (SPT). This team would be made up of influential people in the church and they would be tasked with leading the planning process. I invited our newly hired college pastor and our office administrator, who was a college student, to help me with the selection of the team. Together we identified a group of individuals consisting of 7 lay leaders, our office administrator, our college pastor and myself. Each member was chosen based on their individual investment in the future of our church, their current involvement in the life of the church, and on Malphur's suggestion that these individuals should already have "influence throughout the church and the respect of the members."⁸⁴ Other factors that influenced the team selection were regular participation in Sunday worship, weekly Bible studies, and occasional events, already serving in a position of leadership and some knowledge of the history of the church. The lay leaders represented various age groups, ranging from 24 to 72. Additionally, three of the team members had attended EUMC for less than three years, while two of the team members had attended EUMC for over 30 years. Once an initial group of potential team members was identified by me and our college pastor, we began interviewing these individuals to gauge their level of interest in participating in this strategic planning team and their passion for the

⁸⁴ Malphurs suggests this team include "the senior pastor; five to ten board members, including the chair person; all the staff in a small church and the executive staff in a large church; lay teachers; small group leaders; other leaders in other key positions; and any who exert influence over the church but do not have an official role in the church." For more: Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 59.

growth and development of EUMC. While all of them were willing and excited about participating in this process, they were also serving in other leadership roles in the church and worried about their ability to commit to monthly meetings.

We had identified ten people to serve on our SPT, and of these ten people nine of them were already serving on our church council. In an effort to streamline the planning process, and honor everyone's time, we decided to invite the individual who was not already a part of our church council to participate in our regularly scheduled monthly church council meetings. Our council agreed to adjust the regular agenda in order to allow a generous amount of time for the discussion of our strategic plan at the end of each meeting. This meant that our SPT meetings would coincide with our monthly council meetings and none of us would have to find time for another meeting. Our team members were relieved, and the additional church council members were excited to be able to participate in the strategic planning process.

Prior to our first meeting, and in an effort to increase my own knowledge and understanding of EUMC's strengths and to provide our SPT with additional resources to help guide our journey, I gathered with our small staff to work through an appreciative inquiry (AI). According to Sue Annis Hammond, one of the developers of the AI process, the "AI works on the assumption that whatever you want more of already exists

in all organizations. AI generates images that affirm the forces that give life and energy to a system.”⁸⁵ The AI follows a five-step process:

The process starts with a defining conversation of what will we look for. Then there is a discovery of the best of the past and dreaming of future possibilities. The group articulates the themes and dreams of what is and what might be. The participants design a future to achieve the group’s desired destiny.⁸⁶

Our staff spent about one hour working through this process in an effort to name and define the aspects of our church life that we appreciated.

Below is a summary of our findings:

1. What do we look for in a faith community? Greeters who learn names, authentic conversations, open-mindedness, opportunities to build friendships (coffee hour, etc...), opportunities to connect with pastor, opportunities to serve and lead within the church, music that is excellent and theologically sound, thought-provoking messages
2. How have you experienced this? Received personal invitation to church or activities, intentionally reaching out to new people, during impactful worship, meeting new people at church
3. What strengths do we see in ourselves and our congregation? Hard workers, welcoming congregation, passionate about justice and theological study, talented pastor who is great at leading worship, good organizational leadership in office, strong choir and hand bell choir

⁸⁵ Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* (Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing Company, 1996), Preface.

⁸⁶ Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Preface.

4. How could we build on our strengths? Create more space during service to reflect and pray, create more opportunities for kids to get involved with worship, work together to organize church-wide dinners and events to build more community among members

5. What is your vision for the future? Financial stability, vibrant children's ministry, interior and exterior improvements to the building, more diversity in leadership, people trying to learn names and invite friends to church

We believed that by recognizing and embracing those things we already do well as a community, we could begin to build off of those strengths. Similar to the SWOT analysis, the results of this inquiry would help guide our SPT as we sought to build from these strengths, integrating them into our strategic plan.

MEETING ONE: Prepare the Team

On a beautiful evening in late May our team gathered for the first time. One by one, each of our team members arrived and gathered around a large round table in the fellowship hall. We all enjoyed some decaf coffee and homemade cookies, and after a few minutes of small talk, we sat down to begin what would become a journey of transformation for all of us. Per Malphur's recommendation we spent the first few minutes of our first meeting building a foundation for communication and a grievance process. First, we decided to build our model for communication among our team members based on mutual trust and respect. We made a commitment to respect the ideas and feedback provided by each team member, even when we disagreed with one another. Our grievance process was similar, built upon mutual respect, and our team decided that all

negative feedback should flow through the team leader, which was me. I would then share the concerns with our council chair, and together we would determine the necessary response. Now that we had established a foundation for communication and grievance among our team members, we began to address communication with the larger congregation.

Malphurs argues that “If the congregation does not trust the leadership team, the leadership team cannot lead the congregation,” and an essential element in building trust is establishing healthy communication.⁸⁷ The first step in building trust between our strategic planning team and the congregation was to gauge their openness to change and their excitement around a new vision for the church. Prior to our first meeting, our leadership team decided to assess the congregation’s openness in an informal manner through individual conversations. We each committed to meeting with a handful of individuals to share the vision for this strategic planning process and gauge their openness to change. Each team member chose 2-3 church members that they had relationships with and introduced our strategic planning process to them. Thankfully, the overall assessment was that our congregation was excited and poised for a new season of growth and development! Moving forward, our team made a commitment to communicate frequently with members of the congregation about our planning process by utilizing five guiding questions: “1. Who needs to know? 2. What do they need to know? 3. Who will tell them? 4. How will we tell them? 5. When and where will we tell

⁸⁷ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 63.

them?”⁸⁸ Our team agreed that by establishing a healthy system of communication amongst team members and between our leadership team and the congregation we could maintain a high level of trust and keep the congregation updated on things that were relevant or at times when our group required immediate feedback. After this short discussion our SPT completed a short questionnaire to measure our readiness to begin this planning process.⁸⁹ As the point leader I would review these questionnaires after our meeting to ensure that each team member was ready to participate in this process.

Finally, our team got to work examining what would become our model for developing our new strategic plan, one of our team members raised his hand and made a profound statement: “So, I’m all for strategic planning, and I think whatever we come up with will be great for the church. I’m just worried that we (SPT members) will be the ones stuck with implementing all these new programs.” Once again, I was reminded of one of the greatest challenges small churches face: Often the people who are the most invested in the growth and development of the church are also painfully overcommitted. Knowing this, I suggested we focus less on establishing new programs and more on building a new church culture. This was a concept that was introduced by Brian Zehr, a leadership expert, at a recent training I had attended for new UMC pastors.

Brian Zehr is the lead architect of Intentional Impact and Intentional Institute. In his training he makes his philosophy of church leadership clear: “Culture is everything.

⁸⁸ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 65.

⁸⁹ We utilized Malphur’s Readiness for Change Inventory which is included as Appendix A in his book For more: Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 313.

What makes your church work or not work is the culture you have. So, we need to pay attention to and define the culture we're creating for our church."⁹⁰ Zehr is a professional speaker, trainer, coach and leadership developer who works with churches all over the United States as they seek to develop young leaders and healthy churches. He teaches that "the goal of strategic church plans should be to focus less on establishing new programs and more on shifting culture, and this shift ultimately occurs when your values, your narrative and your behaviors are all fully aligned."⁹¹ Our team agreed with Zehr's philosophy, and we knew that our church members were willing to try anything. This meant that they were at risk of further exhaustion if we tried to establish new programs and initiatives. So, we decided that establishing new programs was not the answer. We felt confident that our ability to engage college students and young families would depend on building a new culture around our Wesleyan values, learning how to share our vision and mission effectively with the community and neighboring campus, and by making small adjustments to our current programs. Primarily, we would seek to shift our programming to focus more on serving young families and creating spaces where old and young could gather to be in relationship with one another. The first step, however, was to review our plan of action for the next nine months.

⁹⁰ Brian Zehr, "Intentional Culture," Exponential, last modified 2019, <https://exponential.org/intentional-culture/>.

⁹¹ Brian Zehr, "Growth Engine," Intentional Impact, last modified 2018, <https://intentionalimpact.com/growth-engine/>.

Malphurs recommends a clear outline for the process of developing a strategic

plan:

- I. Meeting One: Preparation for strategic envisioning:
 - a. Explain expectations for the leadership team participants
 - b. Establish a grievance process
 - c. Review results of SWOT analysis
 - d. Prayer
- II. Meeting Two: Development of the Mission and Vision:
 - a. Brainstorming session
 - b. Storyboarding
 - c. Consensus
 - d. Crafting the mission statement based on our focus areas
 - e. Crafting the vision statement
- III. Meeting Three: Discovery of the Core Values / Introducing the research
 - a. Generous Hospitality
 - b. Theological Generosity
 - c. Social Engagement
 - d. Spiritual Vitality
- IV. Meeting Four: Design of the Strategy
 - a. Whom are we trying to reach?
 - i. Young families and college students – conduct focus groups
 - ii. Those adults currently invested and involved in our church
 - b. What are we attempting to do for them?
 - i. Cast a vision for a new future
 - ii. Inspire them to buy into this new vision and get involved
 - c. Who will do this for them?
 - i. Our pastor and leadership team
- V. Meeting Five: Design of the Strategy
 - a. Where will this take place?
 - b. How much will it cost?
- VI. Meeting Six: Presenting the Strategy
 - a. Invite congregational feedback
 - b. Consider feedback and adjust
- VII. Meeting Seven: Implementing the Strategy
 - a. Identify and prioritize objectives and goals
 - b. Articulate action steps – how will we pay for this?
- VIII. Meeting Eight: Evaluation of the proposed plan
 - a. Assign evaluation leader from leadership team
 - b. Develop final congregation survey
 - c. Conduct congregational interviews
- IX. Meeting Nine: Roll out plan with congregation
 - a. Plan an event to present the final plan

b. Develop launch dates and celebrate with congregation⁹²

We spent an hour reviewing Malphur's outline, discussing the purpose for each meeting, and then we took time to examine the various SWOT analyses that had been submitted to me a few weeks prior. The results of these SWOT analyses would help guide the development of our new mission and vision statements, as well as define our new church culture. While the SWOT analyses revealed several major strengths and weaknesses, there were a few that were only a few that were consistent among every person's analysis: A): Strengths: an overall willingness to change, younger leadership, a building in the center of town, Wesleyan heritage (which includes a passion for justice) B): Weaknesses: building and branding looks old (which could deter young visitors), lack of young people at church, a felt loss of our Wesleyan identity due to the impending split in the UMC.

After reflecting on these major themes, our team decided that our new strategic plan should focus primarily on two goals: engaging millennials and increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. Due to the lack of young people in our service each week and our church's location, which is less than one mile from a major public university, we hoped to create a plan that would allow our engagement with college students and young family to grow. We also believed that with the current challenges the UMC was facing, and many of our members' growing desire to understand the history of our Methodist tradition, we wanted to create more opportunities to share about our Wesleyan heritage.

⁹² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 19.

We crafted a plan of action for the areas of focus for our strategic plan:

I. Building on our major strengths:

- A. An overall willingness to change,
- B. Younger leadership: new pastor and college pastor
- C. An historic building in the center of town, located less than one mile from college campus
- D. Wesleyan heritage – social justice, theological exploration, inclusion

II. Focusing on areas of improvement:

- A. Building and branding need a facelift
- B. Lack of young people in regular attendance at church
- C. A felt loss of our Wesleyan heritage due to the impending split in the UMC

At our next meeting I would present my own research to the team. My presentation would focus on what millennials are looking for in a faith community and ways to increase our congregation's knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. Finally, our team prayed together and said goodnight. As I shut off the lights in the fellowship hall and made my way back to my office, I realized we had a big task ahead.

MEETING TWO: Development of Mission/Vision

Developing a clear and focused mission statement is core to the strategic planning process. Malphurs writes that “The mission answers the first fundamental question of the ministry: What are we supposed to be doing? or, Where are we going?”⁹³ The mission

⁹³ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 106.

statement has five key elements: “A mission is broad, a mission is brief, a mission is Biblical, a mission is a statement, a mission is what the ministry is supposed to be doing.”⁹⁴ Malphurs recommends the team participate in a brainstorming or storyboarding session in order to develop a mission statement. Our team decided to start this process by identifying the direction our church was heading and by examining other church’s mission statements. We chose to review other mission statements and share our thoughts remotely prior to our second meeting.

We began our second meeting together with prayer, and I offered a recap of the previous meeting’s discussion. Prior to this meeting, I emailed a short summary of my research findings to each team member to provide a foundation for our team as we began this strategic planning process. As soon as our meeting began I invited team members to provide feedback from the research I had shared. I had also prepared a short list of discussion questions that would guide the first half of our time together, which would focus on my research. I knew this discussion would play a significant role in the creation of our plan, so I hoped to create a space to offer more insight on the research, as well as inviting questions and concerns from team members. Ultimately, this research would inform the creation of our strategic plan.

Each team member received an electronic document prior to this meeting that consisted of a summary of my research findings. This document focused on two primary

⁹⁴ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 118.

elements: What millennials are looking for in a faith community? How our Wesleyan heritage fits into our desire to engage millennials?

What are millennials looking for?

1. Generous hospitality: This category includes opportunities to serve and lead, a spirit of openness, desire for diversity and inclusion, creating spaces for developing inter-generational relationships, and opportunities for fellowship and participation.
2. Spiritual vitality: This category would include robust spiritual practices in worship and the daily life of the congregation such as healing prayer, testimony, experiential prayer, reflection and a culture of celebration.
3. Social engagement: This category includes acts of justice and social activism, a vocal presence in the community that speaks out on behalf of marginalized people, and a commitment to local and global mission and development work.
4. Theological generosity: This includes progressive and critical theological thinking, being taught how to think and not what to think, in-depth biblical study, a desire to engage multiple perspectives and the ability to maintain and respect different opinions within the faith community.

How does our Wesleyan heritage support our desire to engage millennials?

1. Generous hospitality: In his book, *Why I Am a United Methodist*, William H. Willimon writes about Wesley's vision for the church: "As Mr. Wesley discovered, the church, no matter how big it becomes, is still primarily a face-to-face meeting of friends who know and care about one another."⁹⁵ The concept of hospitality runs deep

⁹⁵ Willimon, *Why I Am A United Methodist*, 112.

throughout the history of the Methodist tradition. Wesley's goal was to develop small class meetings, led by his itinerant preachers, for the sake of providing individuals with a safe space where they could be intimately known and where they could grow together with their peers in their knowledge and experience of God. This is, in essence, the meaning of generous hospitality in the church, creating safe spaces where people can be authentic, ask questions and grow together.

2. **Spiritual vitality:** Individual spiritual development was central to John Wesley's life and ministry. In fact, he coined the term 'spiritual respiration.' Spiritual respiration was Wesley's belief that individuals might attain personal spiritual perfection by God's sanctifying grace through constant connection with God's spirit. Much like humans rely on the act of breathing, we must continually breathe in the power of God's spirit.

3. **Social engagement:** In 1908 the United Methodist Church sought to formally recognize the pursuit of social holiness in the formation and development of the denomination by drafting the United Methodist Social Creed. This creed establishes that United Methodists will forever "dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world."⁹⁶ The final portion of the creed states, "We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ L. Fitzgerald Reist, ed., *2016 United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, 166.

⁹⁷ L. Fitzgerald Reist, ed., *2016 United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, 166.

4. Theological generosity: Wesley did not believe the Christian journey was only about having faith in God. He was convinced that our role as followers of Christ was to study the history and doctrine of Christianity and he sought to create more opportunities for parishioners to think critically about God. John Wesley ultimately embraced a method of theological exploration that focused on four main elements: scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. This method is now known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

After reviewing this document together, I offered a series of discussion questions that would help foster dialogue to inspire the development of our new mission. Below are the questions we discussed in light of this new research:

1. Were you surprised by what the research shows regarding millennials? How do they differ from your preconceived notions?
2. How do you agree or disagree with the research?
3. How could these findings influence our strategic plan?
4. Are you encouraged or discouraged by these findings and why?
5. In light of this research, how can EUMC adapt in order to engage millennials and preserve our Wesleyan heritage?

After a wonderful discussion around the research presented, our team began the process of developing a new mission statement. Our mission statement would be based on our primary areas of focus and the research findings presented during this meeting. In an effort to save time, I had shared our church's current mission statement with each team member prior to this meeting. I asked each person to reflect on this mission statement

and to pray over the words to discern whether our mission was a genuine reflection of our church's values. Team members were asked to respond with feedback.

Together we discussed the ways in which our current mission statement reflected our new areas of focus: to engage millennials and increase our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. We then shared about how our mission statement might be lacking. I wrote on a white board the words and themes that had arisen from our discussion surrounding the research presented. After several minutes of brainstorming, our SPT settled on the primary words or phrases that seemed to overlap between our church's current mission statement and values and the direction our church hoped to move in the future. The primary words or concepts that were captured were: connection, welcoming, all people, and community. Using these words, our team crafted a draft of our new mission statement based on the intended focus of our strategic plan, to reach millennials and to embrace our Wesleyan heritage. After two rounds of revisions in our group, everyone felt that the new mission statement was a better reflection of our newly-formed focus for ministry. Our SPT had a limited amount of time for this portion of our planning process. Otherwise, we would have spent more brainstorming and storyboarding our mission statement, which would have been a more collaborative approach. Due to the limited duration of our SPT meetings, our team chose to share individual feedback with the team leader and entrusted the team leader with crafting a draft of the mission statement as a starting point. Now that we had developed a new mission statement, we shifted our focus to the new vision statement.

Malphurs describes the vision statement this way: “The vision provides us with a picture of what the mission will look like as it is realized in the life of the community, a picture of the port where our boat is headed.”⁹⁸ The vision statement is visual in nature and depicts the hoped-for future version of our church. According to Malphurs, the vision statement is crucially important for a church because it “provides energy, creates cause, fosters risk taking, legitimizes leadership, energizes leadership, sustains ministry and motivates giving.”⁹⁹ As a team, we decided to use the same method of brainstorming to develop our vision statement. We began by reviewing our current vision statements, and then we took several minutes review vision statements from other churches. We then worked together to make any changes or updates to our current vision statements based on the research presented and any ideas we had gathered from the other church vision statements. At the conclusion of our second SPT meeting, we wrote our new mission and vision statements on the board and voted to adopt them as a guide for the remainder of our strategic planning process.

Our new mission and vision statements read:

EUMC Mission Statement:

Our mission is to create a welcoming space where all people can gather as a community to connect with God and others and learn about God’s purpose for our lives.

EUMC Vision Statement:

⁹⁸ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 128.

⁹⁹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 128.

- At EUMC, we envision a vibrant and growing church where people of all ages and from all backgrounds gather regularly to worship and serve God.
- We envision helping all people — young and old — to discover their God-given gifts and abilities so that they are equipped to participate in God’s work of redemption in the world.
- We envision a place where the outcast, the depressed, the marginalized and broken can find love, acceptance, hope and guidance.
- We seek to be a community committed to prayer, theological study and local and global service.¹⁰⁰

MEETING THREE: Discovery of Core Values

Two meetings down, seven more to go. So far, our team had worked well together, and we were all excited about the new mission and vision of our church. We all believed this new direction was something the congregation would support, and we were hopeful that our new mission would guide our church into a bright future. Our third meeting together would focus on the more practical question of What’s the why?

Malphurs describes the core values of a church as “the very building blocks (DNA) of your ministry and they explain why you do what you do or don’t do what you should do. Core values form the foundation on which the mission and vision are built, and along with them form the church’s core ideology.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ellensburg United Methodist Church Council, “Core Values,” About Us, last modified 2019, <https://ellensburgmc.org/contact/about-us/values/>.

¹⁰¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 146.

According to Malphurs, our core values should consist of five primary elements:

1. They are the constant threads that hold together the ever-changing organizational fabric.
2. A good core value touches the very heart and soul of the church and elicits powerful emotions. In other words, they are passionate.
3. While our core values may not all be found in the Bible; they must not contradict Biblical concepts.
4. They are consistent with our church's core beliefs, or the convictions or opinions that our church holds as true.
5. Core values empower and guide the church's ministry.¹⁰²

In his book, Malphurs provides two core values audits: Church Ministry Core Values Audit and Personal Core Values Audit.¹⁰³ Our team chose to take the Church Ministry Core Values Audit which lists 19 values and requires the participant to rank each value on a scale from 1 (not important) to 4 (most important). After completing these audits, our team members took time to discuss their results to see which values overlapped. In an effort to include the voices of those we were trying to reach I also asked our college pastor to do this same core values audit with her college small group the week before. The students were excited to participate in this process, and they happily agreed to take time during their regularly schedule study to fill out this audit. There were 8 students in attendance that week and their answers were included in our SPT discussion. After reviewing all of the audit responses from SPT members and from our college students, the top five values were: ministry/service, fellowship, worship, creativity and prayer. These values would be included in some way in the formation of our new church values.

¹⁰² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 151-153.

¹⁰³ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 343.

The next step was for our team to examine our current core values which were listed on our website. We wanted to revisit these values, and instead of starting from scratch, we all believed they might provide a good starting point for defining our new core values, based on the results of the values audit.

Our previous core values were as follows:

1. Commitment to the Word. We understand the Word of God to be Jesus Christ, the final and supreme authority above all things. Therefore, we seek to study and interpret all of Scripture through the lens of Christ, as the foundation of our faith.
2. Celebration of Diversity. We recognize, accept, and celebrate the diversity of ideas and people. We unconditionally share God's love of all people.
3. Social Justice. We believe that all God's children have a right to live and work in environments that support equity and fairness.
4. Service to Others. We believe in serving those in need through our gifts and actions.
5. Stewardship. We believe that God has entrusted us to be responsible stewards of our personal resources, our church, this community, and the earth's natural resources.
6. Personal and Social Spiritual Growth and Renewal. We strive for spiritual growth and renewal in our own lives, as well as in the world, through study, worship, and service.¹⁰⁴

Our current values largely mirrored the results of our values audit, so we decided to use our current values as a draft. Then, our team reviewed the four primary elements that millennials are searching for in a faith community: generous hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement, and theological generosity. These four elements seemed to reflect and support the feedback we had received from college students in our church. So, based on these four general categories, our SPT decided to make a few small adjustments to our current values. For this process we chose to use a different method.

¹⁰⁴ Ellensburg United Methodist Church Council, "Core Values," About Us, last modified 2019, <https://ellensburgumc.org/contact/about-us/values/>.

Each person took several minutes with our current values and spent time rewording and making changes to them in order to help merge them with our new mission and vision. After several minutes of working independently our group gathered once more with the white board to review everyone's proposed changes. While many themes were discovered, only five primary changes were ultimately adopted, and our new core values were drafted as follows:

1. Commitment to theological generosity. We understand the Word of God to be Jesus Christ, the final and supreme authority above all things. Therefore, we seek to study and interpret all of Scripture through the lens of Christ, as the foundation of our faith, and we welcome different perspectives and views in an effort to grow as a community.
2. Celebration of Diversity. We recognize, accept, and celebrate the diversity of ideas and people. We unconditionally share God's love of all people.
3. Commitment to Social Engagement. True to our Wesleyan heritage, we believe that all God's children have a right to live and work in environments that support equity and fairness, and we believe our role as Christ-followers is to participate in God's work of redemption in the world.
4. Practicing hospitality. We in creating a safe space where all people feel welcome, and in serving those in need through our gifts and actions.
5. Stewardship. We believe that God has entrusted us to be responsible stewards of our personal resources, our church, this community, and the earth's natural resources.
6. Commitment to spiritual vitality. We strive for spiritual growth and renewal in our own lives, as well as in the world, through theological study, communal worship, and local and global service.¹⁰⁵

Our SPT decided to adopt these new core values as a part of our new strategic plan that would be presented to the congregation at the conclusion of our planning process during a special service and through our email newsletter. After reviewing these values, along with our new mission and vision statements, the congregation would have

¹⁰⁵ These values were adapted from our previous core values: Ellensburg United Methodist Church Council, "Core Values," About Us, last modified 2019, <https://ellensburgumc.org/contact/about-us/values/>.

an opportunity to provide feedback through a congregational survey and through individual conversations with our team members. In addition, our college pastor would present these new values and our mission and vision statements at the college bible study, and the students would also have an opportunity to provide feedback.

MEETINGS FOUR & FIVE: Designing the Strategy

Summer was upon us, and as our SPT gathered for our fourth meeting we all wished our church had installed central air conditioning. Thankfully, the basement fellowship hall was much cooler than the weather outside, and as we wrapped up our church council agenda, we began to discuss the agenda for our ensuing SPT meeting. Using our typed agendas as fans, we dove into our fourth topic: The Design of the Strategy. Malphurs offers a guiding question for developing the strategy: “Now that we know our mission and can see the vision of our future, what will it take to get there?”¹⁰⁶ This question would guide our discussion for the fourth and fifth SPT meetings.

Malphurs defines the strategy as “the process that determines how your ministry will accomplish its mission. This definition relates to the mission, the process, and the answer to the question How.”¹⁰⁷ Malphurs uses five questions to guide the development of the strategy: “1. Whom are we trying to reach? 2. What are we attempting to do for them? 3. Who will do this for them? 4. Where will this take place? 5. How much will it cost?”¹⁰⁸ Because our mission and vision focused largely on reaching millennials, we

¹⁰⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 167.

¹⁰⁷ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 171.

¹⁰⁸ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 174.

knew our strategy must be tailored to this younger generation. Thankfully, several members of our SPT were millennials and their feedback would be vitally important during this discussion. In an effort to include the voices of college students our college pastor had also invited three students to attend this meeting. They would provide crucial feedback and insight as we sought to discover ways to increase engagement from their peers and to cultivate a deeper connection to the university campus.

Our SPT made a commitment to focus on changing the church culture instead of establishing new programs. Therefore, our strategy would rely heavily on the infusion of our mission, vision and core values, which were informed by our desire to engage millennials and to increase our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, into the regular life of the church. We chose to integrate our plan into the current rhythms of the church as opposed to establishing new programs. We sought to determine those aspects of regular church life that might be good spaces in which we could integrate elements of our new strategic plan. We ultimately decided there were five primary environments where we could best implement our strategic plan: during our weekly congregational worship, weekly small groups, experiencing shared service opportunities, updating the church's appearance, our web presence, and through one-on-one discipleship meetings.

These regular programs and events would provide the best space to introduce our new plan as they each included a diverse group of participants. For example, at our church service each week normally people from every age group would be in attendance, including young families and college students, the demographic we hoped to reach more effectively. We also decided to host an additional dinner, especially for young families,

where we could introduce our new strategic plan and invite their feedback. This would also provide us with a dedicated time to brainstorm with these parents of young children on ways to increase our ministry to children and to parents. In addition, our weekly college bible study would provide the ideal environment to introduce our plan, and during this time our college pastor could invite the students to provide feedback and a space to brainstorm about any necessary changes or adjustments to the plan. Our SPT utilized Malphur's recommended structure to create this short outline and description of how our strategic plan would be introduced:

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP:

Our team recognized that our liturgy shapes our theology. Our regular Sunday worship experience is liturgical in nature and largely traditional. However, our congregation is always open to trying new things so we all felt confident that the weekly worship gathering would be a wonderful time to introduce our new mission and vision, focusing on millennials and introducing new elements that focus on our Wesleyan heritage. We could introduce a Sunday school class during our regularly schedule worship service to give young parents and opportunity to enjoy worship and to give children a space to learn. In addition, we could make a greater effort to promote our post-service coffee hour and perhaps be more intentional about providing conversation starters and topics for those who stay to get to know new people.

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

We are trying to reach people of all ages. However, because we already have a larger population of individuals between the ages of 50-80, the target audience for our strategic plan is millennials (adults between the ages 18-39).

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

Part of the feedback we received from our college students was that they wanted to participate in the worship service each week. This would range from serving as liturgist to playing an instrument or singing a solo. We also sought to create a more engaging worship experience, based on the previously proposed research, by introducing more contemporary music, creating space for prayer and reflection, training our volunteers to learn names and to cultivate a more hospitable environment, and inviting attendees to participate in worship. In addition, we will introduce more theological exploration and a deeper examination of scripture during the sermon, and our songs and prayers will introduce theological concepts such as justice, peace and equality.

The worship experience will also provide a venue to share the new mission and vision of the church as we will work to regularly integrate these into the welcome, sermon and announcements portion of the service. Our young parents also expressed a desire to have more lessons or activities for their children, and several of them were having a hard time focusing during the service with their children present. So, our SPT decided to try an optional Sunday school class for any child that wishes to learn in a different setting and for any parents who are interested in their children participating in this type of class. For parents who wished to keep their children present during the service we would also encourage that. Finally, during our coffee hour after the service,

we can ask our lay leaders and pastoral staff to wear name tags and be intentional about meeting new people and helping to foster more meaningful dialogue around the tables.

C. Who will do this for them?

Senior pastor, associate pastor, Sunday volunteers

D. Where will this take place?

This will take place primarily in the sanctuary and the North Narthex where the main entrance is located.

E. How much will it cost?

The cost for making additions and adjustments to our regular worship service will be minimal and are already included in our operating budget: purchasing new sheet music, choir pieces, any new children's worksheets or material, and name tags for volunteers.

SMALL GROUPS:

Our church hopes to establish two weekly intergenerational Bible studies and one weekly college Bible study on the university campus. These small groups would provide space for attendees to meet new people, build deeper friendships, take a more in-depth look at scripture together, and to periodically discuss cultural issues. The average combined attendance of these weekly small groups could be up to 30 people and these groups would primarily consist of current members and occasional visitors.

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

While the target audience for this strategic plan is millennials, we also hope to serve our older members through small groups and Bible studies.

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

Because these groups are designed to be small and more intimate, they provide a wonderful opportunity for participants to go deeper in relationship, study Scripture together and to learn more about our Wesleyan heritage. We will introduce our new mission and vision statements at these groups and invite group members to brainstorm ways they could get more involved in our strategic plan. In addition, we will utilize the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a method of Biblical interpretation during our Bible study small groups, and we will create opportunities throughout each quarter where all the groups will gather together to share a meal. This will allow our college-aged participants to get to know some of the older members.

Part of the feedback provided by our college students was that they were having a hard time attending weeknight bible studies or events because of the many activities offered to them on campus and from other campus clubs. In an attempt to make the college bible study more accessible, our college pastor decided to change the time for the weekly college bible study to Wednesday mornings at 7am. She chose to meet at a coffee shop on campus in hopes that this location would be convenient for students on their way to class. This decision paid off, as our attendance for this bible study doubled, and our students have all communicated how much they prefer meeting in the morning.

C. Who will do this for them?

These groups will be led by our senior pastor, college pastor and lay leaders

D. Where will this take place?

Our small groups would take place on Monday evening and Wednesday evening at the church. The College small group would meet on Wednesday mornings on campus.

E. How much will it cost?

There will be a minimal cost to making changes to our small group formats and content.

The costs could include purchasing new written materials and/or videos or subscriptions, as well as providing meals for our combined small group gatherings.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES:

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

Serving together as a church provides an opportunity to build inter-generational relationships. This allows us to engage people of all ages. However, our primary focus is on engaging millennials so the projects we choose to participate in will be geared towards young people. In addition, during our college bible studies, several students have mentioned a desire to participate in more service opportunities as a church. Several other young people from our congregation have expressed a desire to serve on local projects as well as someday plan an international mission trip.

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

The previously stated research suggests that millennials care about participating in ministry and engaging in opportunities to serve their community. In addition, in order for our college ministry to maintain its status as an official campus club, our students are required to participate in two service projects each quarter. Ideally, these service opportunities would take place in the community and all of our church members would be invited to participate. We are attempting to provide more opportunities for our church

members to connect with college students to encourage multi-generational relationships.

We will be intentional about promoting these opportunities each week at church and during small groups, so attendees will be aware that we are active in the community.

C. Who will do this for them?

Our senior pastor, leadership council and college pastor will take the lead on identifying service opportunities in the community. A point person will be assigned to coordinate and lead each opportunity.

D. Where will this take place?

Initially, our service projects will be locally focused. In the next 2-3 years we hope to take a team on an international mission trip.

E. How much will it cost?

Each local project will differ in cost depending on who we partner with. For instance, if we partner with Habitat for Humanity to build a house there will be no cost to our church. However, if we decide to take a regional mission trip, there would be a cost for gas, lodging and food, as well as for materials. This cost could range between \$300-1000 per person.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF CHURCH:

Our SPT unanimously agreed that our building looked tired and needed a facelift. We all understand that the physical appearance of a church influences someone's first impression, as well as communicate the value we place on our space. The colors, design and amount of natural light can all influence the emotional and spiritual experience of attendees. Our building was renovated in the 1960s and there have been no major

updates or improvements since then. During our research phase, our group received lots of feedback from community members that our church was dark and looked uninviting. We also invited our SPT and our college bible study participants to complete Malphur's Creating a Welcoming Environment questionnaire which provided specific feedback for ways we could improve the physical environment and aesthetic of the church.¹⁰⁹ Based on this feedback, we made the decision to try and make small updates in order to improve the curb appeal and provide a fresh appearance that might help our church feel more current. Most importantly, as the building is the first impression for any new visitor, we hoped that the appearance of our building would reflect the energy and vibrancy of our congregation.

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

We are interested in making updates to the curb appeal of our church building as we discovered through our SWOT analysis that many church members believe the building looks old and tired. This is the first impression of our church for a new visitor and our team believes we should work harder to improve the aesthetic of the building.

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

Due to our lack of finances, we sought to make small and inexpensive improvements.

We will paint the outside of our building (the non-brick portion) a lighter color that would complement the trim of the historic brick portion of our building. We would also remove window coverings in the entryway that will allow more natural light to enter. In an effort to be more intentional about communicating our values, we will hang framed

¹⁰⁹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 352.

pictures of each of our core values with a short description on the blank walls lining the stairwell leading up to our sanctuary. We could also adjust our maintenance budget to make it possible to repair several broken or cracked windows on the front wall of our building. Also, to acquire more funds that could help pay for more significant upgrades and repairs to our aging church building, we are considering selling the parsonage. This would have to be approved by the church council, and the profit from the sale could pay for things like new carpet, new wooden siding, solar panels, central air conditioning and more.

C. Who will do this for them?

Our trustees committee will be responsible for making decisions to upgrade the building and they will also oversee each project. The senior pastor will be responsible for guiding any updates made to the website and social media platforms.

D. Where will this take place?

The major repairs and upgrades will occur on the interior and exterior of our church building. All marketing changes will be focused on our website and social media platforms.

E. How much will it cost?

The total cost for these initial updates will be around \$3,000. We could allocate money from our maintenance budget for these projects, and possibly tap into profits made from our annual fundraiser. If we are able to sell the parsonage, which is currently unoccupied, we would have significantly more funds to use on updates. This could allow us an additional \$200-300,000.

ONLINE PRESENCE:

The SPT agreed that our online presence, primarily the church website and our social media outlets, are a crucial aspect of our physical appearance. We all decided that the website needed an update, and we began investigating cost-effective ways to upgrade the appearance and functionality of our website and social media platforms. The truth is, in our modern culture, “if someone wants to find a church in your area, most people go straight to Google.”¹¹⁰ Seeing as our current church website had not been updated in several years, our SPT decided to invest the necessary time into reviewing our website. As a part of this process we contacted the UMC’s national media department and invited them to offer critical feedback and suggestions for how to modernize our website for little or no cost. In addition, our research showed that millennials are searching for opportunities to take leadership in the church. Most of our college students are familiar with web design and participate regularly on social media. Their expertise and experience would prove to be a vital resource as we sought to update our website. Consulting on the design and restructuring of our website and social media platforms seemed like the perfect way to invite more participation from college students and young people in our church. We invited our college students to review our current church website and provide any suggested changes or additions in an email to the college pastor.

¹¹⁰ Tony Morgan, “10 Reasons Your Church Should Have a Website,” *Church Leaders*, July 22, 2011, https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-blogs/152269-tony_morgan_10_reasons_your_church_should_have_a_website.html.

We had a large response, and two students even volunteered to assist the senior pastor in redesigning the website.

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

We are committed to engaging more young families and college students in this community.

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

We are hoping to update our web presence in order to facilitate a more modern and inviting first impression for individuals searching for a new church online. We also hope to build a website that clearly communicates our church's values and mission, as well as shares the diversity of our congregation.

C. Who will do this for them?

Our senior pastor is knowledgeable and skilled in web and graphic design and will act as the point person for the redesign and rebuilding of our website and social media platforms. He will enlist the support of several college students and other individuals who would like to participate in the process of updating our online presence.

D. Where will this take place?

All of the updates will take place on our church website and our social media accounts.

E. How much will it cost?

There will be no initial cost to updating the look of our church website.

6. One-on-one discipleship meetings:

Part of the role of our senior pastor, college pastor and lay leaders is to meet with individual church members and community members to counsel them and encourage

them in their faith journey. These meetings happen throughout the week and provide the ideal setting to socialize and promote our new mission and vision for the church. These meetings allow space for individual church members to ask questions and provide feedback and suggestions for ways the church can engage millennials and increase our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. More specifically, our college pastor began asking students to share their vision for what they hoped the church might look like in 5-10 years. This feedback was important as we continued to adjust our plan, and this also made students feel more like they were a part of the process. I also began to meet individually with several of our young parents to invite them to speak into this process and to share their own hopes and dreams for our church. Their feedback was important and supported much of what our SPT had already developed.

A. Whom are we trying to reach?

We are committed to engaging more young families and college students in this community.

B. What are we attempting to do for them?

We are encouraging individual discipleship relationships among our church members and a more open and informal style of dialogue and evaluation for our strategic plan.

C. Who will do this for them?

These meetings will be primarily between our staff and lay leaders and members of the congregation, as well as any new guests who wish to make a deeper connection or learn more about our church.

D. Where will this take place?

These meetings will take place either at the church or in the community at a coffee shop or restaurant. Our college pastor spends significant time on campus, and she would also be looking for new ways to partner with other on-campus organizations. Her meetings would largely take place on campus.

E. How much will it cost?

The costs for one-on-one meetings could include coffee or lunch. We averaged \$200-300 per month.

SECTION 4.2: Presenting the Strategy

Our SPT decided to present our strategic plan to the congregation through three primary methods: Sunday worship, our email newsletter and through small group bible studies. Each of these venues provided an opportunity to present the plan and invite feedback by individual members, as well as giving them an opportunity to vote on the proposed plan. The details of those surveys and plan evaluation will be discussed in meeting eight.

MEETING SIX: Introducing our Strategic Plan

During the sixth meeting, our team discussed how we would present the plan to congregants and chose a survey tool to measure the congregation's approval of the proposed plan. Our team decided to present our new strategic plan in three-phases. These phases were primarily chosen based on cost to implement each phase, which would ultimately determine the timeline. Phase one consisted of sharing the general concepts that informed the construction of our general plan: generous hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement, theological generosity. We would introduce these concepts and the basic research that informed them first, so the congregation would understand the theological and practical elements that built the foundation for our strategic plan. Phase two would focused on sharing the nuts and bolts of our plan at small groups and in the weekly email newsletter. Phase three would consist of a congregational meeting following our church service the following Sunday. Everyone from the church would be invited to attend this meeting and offer any feedback or suggestions. Our SPT chose to dedicate one week to present our new plan beginning with Sunday worship, continuing in our weekly small groups and our email newsletter that would go out to all of our

members on Thursday, and concluding with our congregational meeting on the following Sunday.

PHASE ONE: Sunday Worship

Phase one would be focused on introducing the congregation to the four general concepts which informed our strategic plan: First, we would present our new mission and vision statements in the bulletin and display them on the screen as people entered for worship at our 10am service. As the service began we would then invite our liturgist, one of our college students, who would also be doing the morning welcome, to share with the congregation that this Sunday would be dedicated to sharing the elements that inspired our new strategic plan with the church and implementing these elements into the service.

During the welcome our liturgist would highlight the new mission and vision statements which were displayed on the screen. She would then announce that volunteers would be passing out a one-page document that highlighted the four focus areas of our new plan: generous hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement, and theological liberalism. She then would encourage everyone to review these concepts and try to identify moments during the service where each of them was being highlighted. Finally, she would make everyone aware that there would be a short survey available for each person to pick up on their way out. These surveys could be filled out and returned to the church office, and they would provide our team with feedback on the congregation's excitement and willingness to embrace a new strategic plan. The survey also provided a space for attendees to share their own ideas about the future of our church. In addition, we would announce that the following week we would hold a congregational meeting

after the service which would provide an opportunity for everyone to share their thoughts about our new strategic plan. We decided to present our plan in a more practical manner, through a worship experience and on the individual handouts. We believed this would give attendees an opportunity to see the new plan in action before offering any feedback.

Our SPT created a presentation model based on our areas of focus:

I. Hospitality: Prior to this worship service we would invite our SPT and our church council members, as well as each person who would be participating in this service to wear a name tag to church. These individuals would serve as our church representatives. They would be charged with meeting new people, learning names, and answering any questions guests might have about how to get more involved at the church. In the past, EUMC has provided name tags for any members or attendees who wish to wear one but moving forward our SPT decided that this prevented people from trying to learn names. Moreover, any person without a name tag, like a first-time guest, would feel left out. This was a subtle shift for our SPT and Sunday volunteers, but this new method is more consistent with our vision for creating a hospitable space.

II. Spiritual vitality: After the welcome, our music director would stand to lead a song. Immediately following the first congregational song, she would offer a moment of silence and an invitation for prayer and reflection. This would be new to many of our congregants, and we knew some might be uncomfortable with the silence. Our hope was to incorporate this moment of silence in an effort to encourage a deeper level of spirituality during the service. Also, our SPT decided to construct a candle-lit alter that would be open to all during and after the service. This would be a space where

individuals could write down and pin prayer requests to a bulletin board that could then be prayed for by anyone in the congregation. This prayer wall was inspired by the wailing wall in Jerusalem.¹¹¹ We constructed this board to encourage people to pray and share their needs during and after each service.

III. Social engagement: The next praise song would begin after a brief pause and time for reflection. Each of the songs would be chosen specifically to highlight our new focus on social engagement. While there are many songs to choose from, we chose two more contemporary songs to begin with that might appeal more to young people: You're Worthy of My Praise by David Ruis and God of This City by Aaron Boyd, Andrew McCann, and Ian Jordan. Our music director would share that these songs were focused on a calling to serve and engage in acts of justice in our city and in the world. Following the first two congregational songs, our liturgist would stand again to offer a prayer that was centered on the church's role as an agent of justice in the community. After the congregation prayed together, we would take part in prayers of the people which is a time for congregants to raise their hands and share their prayer needs with the entire community. The prayers of the people highlight our commitment to trusting God with our needs.

IV. Theological generosity: Malphurs notes the effectiveness of sermons as a formal method of communicating the strategic plan. He writes that, "Using appropriate scripture, the pastor should preach on the church's core values, mission, vision and

¹¹¹ Adam Augustyn, "Western Wall," Encyclopedia Britannica, Last modified 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-Wall>.

strategy, as designed by the SPT.”¹¹² This is one of Malphur’s recommended methods of formal communication to the congregation. As the SPT leader and pastor, I chose to focus this particular message on the why behind our new strategic plan. Instead of explicitly introducing our new mission and vision statements, and our new core values, my sermon would be based on Wesley’s vision of the church. This would allow me to share with the congregation the reasons behind the SPT’s decision to focus on engaging young people and creating a welcoming space for people to gather and connect with God. This sermon would also allow me the opportunity to introduce our four guiding concepts: hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement and theological generosity. I would then show how these concepts were foundational to Wesley’s own theology and ministry.

Below is a brief outline for this service:

I. Welcome:

Welcome to EUMC where we gather as a community to grow and encourage one another in our journey of faith and where we believe that every person is a beloved child of God. This week we will introducing a new mission and vision for EUMC that was recently developed by our Strategic Planning Team, led by Pastor Mark. We invite you to pay attention to the various elements of our service which will highlight portions of this new strategic plan. At the conclusion of the service you’ll be informed about the many ways you can provide your own feedback to this new mission and vision!

OPENING SONG - *You’re Worthy of My Praise* by Paul Baloche

CENTERING PRAYER (Focus on justice and reconciliation)

¹¹² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 87.

“We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you
Whether in brush arbors or cathedrals, weathered wooden churches or crumbling
cement meeting houses Where your name was lifted and adored. Thank you,
God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone before us. Bless
the memories of your saints, God.”¹¹³

May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and
love. May we remain committed to your work of justice in this world. In the name of
Christ, we pray. Amen.

II. Opening Song – *God of This City* by Chris Tomlin

III. Children’s Time – Invite parents and children up for a short message about God’s
heart for justice

IV: Prayer for Illumination: Join me in our prayer for illumination as we prepare to read
the Word. Gracious God, May your scriptures be my delight always, May be not be
deceived by them. May I not deceive with them. Amen.

V. Scripture Reading: Philemon (New Revised Standard Version)

VI. Message: Mark Wagner – Standing in the Gap¹¹⁴

VII. Invitation to Share: The Scriptures teach us that all things belong to God and that we,
as Christ-followers, are to steward God’s resources. This includes our time, money and
talents. We encourage you to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your giving. If
you have filled out a blue prayer card or connection card, please place those into the plate

¹¹³ Missionary Society of St. Columban, “Daily Prayer,” last modified 2018,
<http://columban.org/article/daily-prayer-give-thanks-all-saints>.

¹¹⁴ See Sermon Notes in Appendix B

as well. Will our ushers please come forward?

VIII. Offertory Solo: *They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love* by Jars of Clay

IX. Doxology: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow, UMH #95

X. Prayers of People, Lord's Prayer

XI. Pass the Peace: Please join us in the ancient Christian tradition of passing of the peace. We do this to prepare our hearts and minds for communion and to freely offer God's peace to one another. If you would prefer not to be touched, please remain seated and we will respect your wishes

XII. Communion: One of the things that distinguished the Methodist tradition from other denominations is that the pinnacle of our service is not the sermon. No, it's communion. The pinnacle of our worship is gathering in community around the Lord's table, where all are welcome - *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* by Charles Wesley

XIII. Closing Prayer: Please pray with me,

“Father, you have given all peoples one common origin. It is your will that they be gathered together as one family in yourself. Fill the hearts of mankind with the fire of your love and with the desire to ensure justice for all. By sharing the good things you give us, may we secure an equality for all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. May there be an end to division, strife and war. May there be a dawning of a truly human society built on love and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord.”¹¹⁵

Thanks for joining us this morning! There are many ways to get involved here from music ministry to college ministry and everything in between. If you are interested in learning more about how to get connected please speak with anyone wearing a nametag

¹¹⁵ Catholic Online, “Prayer,” Catholic Online, last modified 2020, <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=722>.

and please join us downstairs for coffee and pastries. Also, on your way out please make sure and take a copy of our strategic plan which includes the new mission and vision statement. Over the next week we will be inviting you to provide feedback to our plan! -Wednesday morning is our “Coffee & Friends” college ministry Bible study located at the coffee shop in the Student Union building at 7am!

PHASE TWO: Small Groups and Email Newsletter

Our SPT created a two-page document that outlined our proposed strategic plan. This document was designed to share the practical ways we would move EUMC in a new direction, focusing on engaging millennials and increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. Below is the content of that document that would be shared with our church-wide small group and our college small group. When we share the new plan with our college small group, we would immediately invite them to offer their feedback. This would be helpful as we hoped to craft a plan that would appeal to college students.

In an effort to increase our congregation’s knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, our SPT developed a new method of study for our weekly church-wide small group. This new method highlights our Wesleyan heritage and utilizes the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a basis for studying passages of scripture. At each bible study participants will be provided with a handout that includes a brief history of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. After this brief history, the group would read the selected passage and then use the quadrilateral as a method for Biblical exegesis.¹¹⁶ In addition to sharing our new mission and vision

¹¹⁶ See Appendix B

statements in small groups, our SPT would also include our new core values in our weekly email newsletter.

PHASE THREE: Congregational Meeting

One week after our initial introduction of our strategic plan, our SPT would host a congregational meeting after church on Sunday. This meeting would be open to anyone interested in asking questions or offering feedback regarding our strategic plan. While our SPT did have some reservations about opening this plan up for an open discussion, we all felt confident that one week would be enough time for church members to read over our plan and submit private feedback via email or phone call during the previous week to avoid any long-winded or confrontational issues.

The structure of our congregational meeting would be simple. As the SPT leader I would offer a quick review of the proposed strategic plan using a PowerPoint presentation. After presenting the research that informed our plan and allowed us to develop our four areas of focus (hospitality, social engagement, theological generosity, and spiritual vitality), I would give an overview of our strategic planning process. Then I would share the one-page document which outlined our three-phase strategic plan.¹¹⁷ After this brief presentation, I would offer a few guiding questions to the congregation, so as not to create a space for entirely open dialogue:

1. How does this strategic plan reflect your own vision for the future of EUMC? Does it?
2. How might you suggest we improve our strategic plan?

¹¹⁷ See Appendix A

3. How might this plan support EUMC’s mission to help all people connect with God and serve as a beacon of hope and justice in this community?

Our SPT knew that people in the church would be grateful to have space to discuss and ask questions about our proposed strategic plan. We predicted that the major issues that might arise during our congregational meeting would revolve around the finances of the church. Primarily, we had heard from many church members that there was a fear we would not have the necessary funds to create and implement a new strategic plan. Our SPT members would prepare to address this issue directly by reminding congregants that the plan was constructed in three phases and would not be implemented all at once. At any point during the execution of our strategic plan if we find ourselves in a more limited financial position, our SPT could make necessary adjustments or delay any further implementation of our plan. However, were we to vote to sell the parsonage we all felt confident that we would have the necessary funds to complete our strategic plan. Overall, we hoped our church members would recognize the need to focus on engaging more young people and would be offer positive feedback regarding our new plan.

MEETING SEVEN: Pre-Implementation Evaluation¹¹⁸

Malphurs recommends two primary forms of evaluation: informal communication and formal communication. Informal communication invites the leadership team to “talk up

¹¹⁸ Malphurs recommends implementing the plan before the evaluation phase. However, our SPT decided to offer the congregation an opportunity to evaluate the proposed plan prior to implementation.

the strategic process with people in the congregation, especially those within their circles of influence” and share about their conversations at each meeting.¹¹⁹ This method provides ongoing feedback from the congregation throughout the nine-month strategic planning process. Formal communication, on the other hand, can include one-way or two-way communication. “One-way communication involves the use of sermons, bulletins, and newsletters, while two-way communication involves things like online chat rooms, town hall meetings and potluck dinners.”¹²⁰ Our SPT decided that we would dedicate the two weeks following our congregational meeting to participate in this evaluation process.

The informal methods of measurement we chose to utilize were individual conversations, personal emails, phone calls, and text messages to individual members of the congregation. Each member of our SPT chose 8 people to communicate with directly. Team members were tasked with communicating with these 8 individuals about the new strategic plan and gathering feedback and criticism to introduce at our final SPT meeting. In order to reach a wide range of congregants, our older SPT members agreed to meet with older members of the congregation. Likewise, our college pastor committed to building a small focus group of five college students that she would meet with to review our strategic plan and invite any additional ideas or feedback. The other members of our SPT that fell within the millennial category agreed to meet with other millennials

¹¹⁹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 64.

¹²⁰ Malphurs also adds personal letters, video announcements, skits and public testimonies from team members as well as personal telephone calls and focus groups as methods of formal and informal evaluation: Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 64.

who have visited or been connected with EUMC in any manner over the past year. We hoped that by reaching out to some non-members we might create a buzz around our new plan, and this would also provide us with feedback from individuals who do not regularly attend church.

For our formal evaluation we would utilize a survey tool that would measure our congregation's excitement surrounding the new strategic plan and their willingness to participate in this strategic plan. In order to complete this evaluation our SPT decided to create a customizable survey using the Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) developed by Holy Cow Consulting, a consulting firm committed to helping churches flourish.¹²¹ Our goal for phase one of the evaluation process would be to gather as much feedback and criticism as possible from individuals in the congregation to make any necessary adjustments to our plan prior to the implementation phase. After receiving the congregations' feedback, our SPT would introduce a revised plan via our email newsletter. At the end of this special newsletter we would ask recipients to respond with approval or further recommendations, which we could take into consideration. In order to deem this process and plan successful, we would require approval from at least 70% of the congregation, based on the feedback we received from this email and from individual conversations with church members. While this process is imperfect, our SPT believed that we would receive enough feedback from our email and through conversations to give us a fairly accurate approval rating.

¹²¹ Holy Cow Consulting, "Congregation Assessment Tool," Congregations, 2019, <https://holycowconsulting.com/congregations/congregation-assessment-tool-cat/>.

MEETING EIGHT: Implementing the Plan

Each phase of our strategic plan will take one year to complete. Year one consists of elements that are of relatively low cost and low risk and can be implemented immediately. Year two consists of more large-scale projects, and year three projects can only be completed if years one and two prove to be successful in increasing our church attendance and participation from young people. In an effort to minimize any additional responsibilities, our SPT focused on changes that would change our church culture. We wanted our behavior to reflect our values, and we wanted to create more opportunities to share about our values with our church members and with the community. At the end of our first year of implementation, our SPT would gather for a final evaluation before electing to continue with the plan for year two. Below is the strategy for implementation for year one of EUMC's plan:

YEAR ONE:

Generous Hospitality:

1. Provide name tags to volunteers on Sunday mornings: Each volunteer or worship participant would be given a name tag. This person would serve as a church representative to answer any questions for visitors or guests, and also would focus on meeting new people and learning names. This would help us create a welcoming environment.
2. Be intentional about inviting attendees to coffee hour after church: Our SPT recognized the importance of intentionality. We wanted to remind our volunteers, staff and worship participants to reach out to new faces and invite them to stay after the

service for coffee hour. People are more likely to stay and visit if they have met someone new to connect with.

3. Paint the dark brown exterior of the church a lighter color to make it more visible from the street and provide a more welcoming appearance and make small improvements to interior: While our trustees committee had a long list of improvements to make on the church building, we realized our church was not in a place financially to pursue all of these updates. However, we did decide that painting the exterior of our North and South Annex, which are both highly visible from the street, would be a minimal cost and would update the church's curb appeal. Our SPT also decided to remove interior window coverings to provide more natural light in our atrium.

4. Invite college students to participate in weekly worship service: Our college pastor informed our SPT that during her meetings with her focus groups, several of the college students were musical and had expressed interest in participating in the Sunday worship service. She agreed to connect these students with our music director. In addition, she would connect with other students that could serve in other volunteer roles from up front on Sundays.

5. Provide a volunteer sign-up table after service: Our SPT agreed to place a long table at the back of the sanctuary that would include materials from our partners in the community offering volunteer opportunities. EUMC serves this community in many ways, but people aren't always aware about how they can get involved. We wanted to make it easier for attendees to learn about ways they can serve and get more connected at

EUMC. We also elected to have a member of our church council staff this table after the service each week to answer any questions.

6. Update website and social media to communicate our values more clearly and appeal to younger people: The EUMC website and social media platforms needed a facelift. Thankfully, we have a few college students that are capable of doing simple website design and they agreed to spend a few hours updating the website and logo. We also asked them to reach out to friends on campus who might be willing to visit our website and social media and offer any constructive criticism. This would ensure that our website appeals to college students. These were simple updates and because we were able to complete them using volunteers from our church there was no additional cost.

Spiritual Vitality:

1. Incorporate moments of silence during service: Connecting with God is important to all of us and, according to the studies we reviewed especially important to millennials. One simple way we sought to increase our spiritual vitality was offering a brief moment of silence at the beginning of our service. Our music director began asking attendees to take a deep breath and reflect on God's presence before beginning the second song. This gave additional space during the service for people to be reminded of God's presence and to experience silence. We also added a brief pause after the sermon as a time of reflection. While these were simple additions to our service, they highlighted our efforts to provide space for congregants to connect with God.

2. Construct prayer wall in sanctuary: One of our team members had attended a church previously that had built a small bulletin board for use as a prayer wall in the sanctuary.

This wall was surrounded by candles and included a ledge where attendees could write prayer requests and pin them to the wall. Then, other people could come and take a few prayer requests to pray over during the week. Our SPT decided to include this concept in the back of our sanctuary and invite congregants to share their requests anonymously on the prayer wall.

3. Remove window shutters in narthex to increase natural light in atrium: One of our SPT members remarked that our physical environment can influence our spirituality. Thus, our SPT elected remove the window coverings that were blocking natural light from entering the atrium. This is the main entrance space of our sanctuary, and many attendees had noted that it felt dark in the room when they entered. When we removed these window coverings the room became much lighter and several people remarked that their moods were immediately lifted by the bright space.

Social Engagement:

1. Choose praise songs with a focus on justice: Our music director suggested that we choose songs that had more of a focus on service and justice. She agreed to search our song database for any past songs that focused on these themes, as well as search for new songs that might communicate our church's focus on social engagement.

2. Advertise all areas our church serves the community: EUMC already partners with several community organizations that serve the poor and homeless in Ellensburg. We also engage in service opportunities such as the cold weather shelter, building Habitat for Humanity homes and providing a free clothing center for the homeless of our community.

However, our church council has not always done a great job at sharing about these

partnerships or ways that church members can participate. We decided to include more advertisements about opportunities to serve on the back of our bulletin each Sunday, as well as including a section at the bottom of our weekly email newsletter that includes “Opportunities to Serve.” This way, everyone who attends church or gets our weekly newsletter will be aware of ways they can get involved in the community.

3. Be more intentional about announcing our community service and involvement at church and inviting people to participate: At the end of each Sunday service we have a time for announcements. In the past, church members have found out about service opportunities after they’ve occurred and commented on how we might do a better job of including these opportunities in the announcements from up front on Sunday.

Theological Generosity:

1. Introduce aspects of Wesleyan theology in sermons and small group bible studies: The easiest way to teach our church members about Wesley’s theology is by incorporating elements of Wesleyan thought into our small group studies and by offering a class on the university campus. We currently have two weekly Bible studies at EUMC, one for all ages and one for college students, and our SPT elected to introduce the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a means of Biblical interpretation at each of these studies. We also decided to dedicate one Sunday each year to a celebration of our Wesleyan heritage where the songs and sermon would be largely inspired by John and Charles Wesley. In addition to the weekly college bible study, I agreed to offer a weeknight class on campus focusing on social issues and other topics that would interest college students. The topics would be chosen based on conversations we had with our college focus group.

2. Invite a time of discussion after sermon and during coffee hour: Every Sunday after church we offer a coffee hour that is always well attended. The purpose is for church attendees to gather and socialize for an hour in an informal manner. Our SPT decided to include conversation starters on each table during this time of fellowship. These cards would have questions about the sermon, as well as general ice breaker questions. The purpose of these conversation starters would be to help visitors find a way to engage in dialogue with other church members and to inspire a more in-depth discussion about the topic of that week's sermon.

3. Include a short blurb in each weekly newsletter introducing a new element of Wesleyan theology: Our SPT decided to include a section in each week's email newsletter called "Why Wesley?" This section would focus on a different aspect of John Wesley's theology or ministry each week. The content would range from short quotes to a brief paragraph offering a definition of one of Wesley's primary theological concepts. This would provide a direct source of knowledge to each church member about the life and theology of John Wesley.

YEAR TWO:

1. Sell parsonage to increase budget for renovations and improvement on church building: As the current senior pastor of EUMC I was not living in the church parsonage. Instead, the church agreed to pay me a housing allowance to offset my own mortgage payment. As our parsonage was empty, and becoming increasingly more difficult to rent, our SPT decided to sell the house. One member of our SPT contacted our District Superintendent to ask for the blessing of the conference and to find out how many other

churches had sold their parsonages in recent years. We were surprised to learn that this is becoming more common Methodist churches. In fact, according to other conference leadership, more than half of the churches in our conference have sold their parsonages. So, our church council voted to prepare the parsonage to be sold and to contact a realtor to begin this process. Because the parsonage is paid off, the sale of the home would provide a significant source of income for future improvements to EUMC and to our programming budget as we seek to hire a children's minister. Our SPT was aware that we would need to allocate a large portion of the proceeds from the sale to put towards our endowment. The endowment would serve as a rainy-day fund and would also ensure that any future clergy would have the funds necessary to go towards their housing allowance. The hope, however, is that through our strategic plan our church would see some growth which would result in an increase in regular giving. This increase would also support any future clergy's housing allowance.

2. Launch a new weeknight fellowship meal for community members: Throughout our research the SPT discovered examples of many churches who had begun special weeknight services for the homeless. Our team decided to explore this option for year two of our strategic plan. We are located in downtown Ellensburg and are one of the most accessible church buildings. This would give us one more opportunity to fulfill our mission to be socially engaged.

3. Hire a children's minister to reach more young families: Our church is committed to reaching more young families and one of the barriers to this has been our limited program offerings for children. Thus, young parents aren't willing to get involved because we

have nothing to offer their kids. We hope to hire a part-time children's minister to develop and teach Sunday school each week and to plan events periodically for young families.

4. Open sanctuary 2-3 days per week for prayer: We currently advertise that our sanctuary is open for prayer 3 days per week, but the doors often remain locked because our office hours are so limited. We hope to change our office hours to coincide with the prayer hours and make our sanctuary space more accessible for anyone seeking a safe and quiet place to pray during the week.

5. Launch a new vespers prayer service one night per week: As part of our effort to increase our spiritual vitality, we hope to offer a weekly evening prayer service. This would be simple programming and would mostly provide an opportunity for people to gather in silence and darkness, perhaps with some soft music, to pray and listen.

6. Develop more strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations: We currently partner with three other community organizations: FISH Food Bank, An Immigration Ministry and Alcoholics Anonymous. We hope to develop more strategic partnerships to provide ongoing support for like-minded organizations that are doing good justice work in our community.

7. Invite other service-oriented organizations to move into the available office space annex: Currently, we have 10 classrooms in an adjoining annex. Four of these classrooms are being used by our partner organizations as office space. There are six empty classrooms that could be rented to other organizations and provide another source

of income for our church, as well as providing more opportunities for us to stay connected to community development work.

8. Introduce a “Methodist 101” class in the Spring: One of our church members is a retired Methodist minister and he is interested in offering a weekly class on the history and theology of our Methodist tradition. This would provide a clear opportunity for our congregants to increase their knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, as well as offering a next step for families hoping to learn more about our church.

9. Introduce a “Welcome to EUMC” class for new attendees next Fall: We currently do not offer any membership classes or classes for anyone hoping to learn about being baptized or joining the church. Our SPT hopes to develop a class that would provide new visitors with an opportunity to learn about joining the church. During this class, new attendees will be given a book about the history of the Methodist movement and the foundations of our tradition. There will also be an introduction to our Wesleyan theology to help provide new attendees with a solid foundation as they begin to connect with the life and mission of EUMC. Through this class new attendees will begin to learn how our Wesleyan heritage informs our mission and vision.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION:

Phase two of our evaluation will take place at the end of year one of our strategic planning process. During year one of our strategic plan our SPT will continue to meet once a quarter for ongoing dialogue and evaluation. In order for our SPT to deem the implementation of our strategic plan successful, we hope to see at least a 30% increase in church attendance and participation from millennials. This increased participation will be

measured through observation by our SPT at during weekly church services, community events (i.e. potlucks, concerts, service projects), and/or growth in our college, children's or music ministry. Additionally, we hope to see an increase in the knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage among current church members. Our team will develop a tool to measure this increase in knowledge such as a short questionnaire to present at church or small groups that focuses on our Wesleyan heritage. These quarterly SPT meetings will be devoted to ongoing evaluation of our strategic plan, and they will consist of four primary elements:

1. Reports on Informal Evaluation Among Congregants
2. Reports on Formal Evaluation Among Congregants
3. Ongoing Need for Adjustments or Changes to Strategic Plan
4. Report of Effectiveness of Strategic Plan

At our first quarterly meeting, each member of our SPT will complete a short survey to measure the success of our two-year planning and implementation process. This survey is designed to measure the effectiveness of our planning process and the dynamics and structure of our SPT meetings and could be used to enhance any future strategic planning purposes at EUMC. This survey was created using a team effectiveness questionnaire developed by the University of Colorado. Each member of our SPT will take this survey and the results will be tallied in order to measure the overall effectiveness of our team's performance:

SPT SURVEY:

Please answer each question from a scale of 1-5

1 meaning strongly disagree, 5 meaning strongly agree

1. Our team has a meaningful, shared purpose.
2. Team members clearly understood their roles.
3. Team problem solving resulted in effective solutions.
4. Team members appreciate one another's unique capabilities.
5. We are able to resolve conflicts with other teams collaboratively.
6. Team members take personal responsibility for the effectiveness of our team.
7. We address and resolve issues quickly.
8. Team members are effective listeners.
9. My team has a strong sense of accomplishment relative to our work.
10. Communication in our group is open and honest.
11. Everyone values what each member contributes to the team.
12. Group meetings are very productive.
13. Members of our team trust each other.
14. We spend very little time complaining about things we cannot control.
15. Team members frequently go beyond what is required and do not hesitate to take initiative.
16. We view everything, even mistakes, as opportunities for learning and growth.
17. We consistently produce strong, measurable results.
18. Our team has mechanisms in place to monitor its results.
19. Team members help one another deal with problems or resolve issues

20. We work toward integrating our plans with those of other work groups.
21. Team members seek and give each other constructive feedback.
22. We are able to work through differences of opinion without damaging relationships.
23. Our team is excited about the contribution it is making to the church's overall success.
24. Team members display high levels of cooperation and mutual support.
25. My team is proud of its accomplishments and optimistic about the future.¹²²

The results from this survey will be used to measure the effectiveness of our team throughout the planning process. The results will also determine how our team will proceed throughout the remaining phases of our strategic planning process. While we hope our church continues to grow and change, this strategic planning process will span only three years. The first year will focus on the creation of the strategic plan, the second year we will implement phase one of our plan, followed by a secondary congregational evaluation. Year three will be the final year of our strategic plan and will only be possible if years one and two are successful. Because this Doctor of Ministry program is limited to 12 months and the scope of this project falls out of that range, the project results were not included in this document.

¹²² University of Colorado, "Team Effectiveness Questionnaire," last modified 2019, https://www.cu.edu/sites/default/files/Team_effectiveness_questionnaire.pdf.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Throughout this strategic planning process our SPT grew together as a community and we all learned some valuable lessons about how to lead a group of people towards a new vision. We were all aware that the process of intentional planning and strategizing would continue for the life of the church. Our SPT hoped that by providing some simple ways for the church to begin to shift our culture towards engaging young families and college students, while also embracing and increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage, we would continue to move in a positive direction towards growth and vitality.¹²³

Through our research and discussion, we discovered that the roots of our Methodist tradition provide a solid foundation for what millennials are searching for in a faith community. Our SPT was encouraged and excited to learn more about our Wesleyan roots. We all feel confident that as we implement our new strategic plan, church members will begin to learn more about our Wesleyan heritage, and, like our SPT, they will begin to see how our commitment to theological exploration, social justice and hospitality provide the perfect context for engaging more young people.

This strategic planning process taught our team many things, and three of the primary lessons we learned were the importance of intentional and strategic socialization of new ideas, the value of humble and collaborative leadership, and the value of simplicity. The greatest challenge our team faced during the first year of planning process was the socialization of new and challenging ideas to the congregation, which

¹²³ Increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage is particularly important as we all await the 2020 vote at the UMC Annual Conference which will determine the future of our denomination and our church's connection to the UMC.

was a difficult and painful process that at times produced resistance among some members. In particular, the idea of spending money on improving the curb appeal of our historic church building proved to be disturbing to some of our older attendees. Several individuals at EUMC have been attending this church for over 50 years, and they all remember when the church was remodeled, and they each value the church's reputation as an historic landmark in downtown Ellensburg. In addition, they remember when EUMC was a large and flourishing church in Ellensburg, boasting an average attendance of over 200 people. This nostalgia for a past era of success created a challenge when our SPT began suggesting making improvements to the appearance of our historic building. Simply the mention of painting the exterior of the building angered several older church members so our team knew we must be intentional about how we socialized these new ideas. The most effective method of socialization we discovered was through informal conversations with influential church members.

As a group we identified the top ten congregants we all believed might be most opposed to new ideas or any concept of change. We then determined who on our SPT had the best relationship with each of these members and this person was tasked with having an individual conversation with each person. Their job was to share our new vision in a sensitive manner and invite any criticism or feedback. Each SPT member also tried to share the why behind our suggestions, focusing on our desire to engage a younger generation to ensure EUMC's long-term relevance and growth. Through this process, our team discovered that by giving individuals the space to share their concerns and grievances in an intimate setting, with a member of the SPT, they felt heard and they felt

their opinions were valued. In most cases, these individual conversations, and our SPT members' commitment to active listening, dissolved any sense of opposition. Ultimately, all of our ideas were embraced by these older church members once we created the space for individual conversations and truly sought to value their opinions and insight. Our commitment to the responsible socialization of new ideas also fostered a sense of humility among our group members.

Our team realized the importance of humble leadership in our first meeting. Many of us shared about our experiences working with other leaders that took charge, often ignoring the feedback or suggestions of others in the room. Several team members shared stories of past leaders they described as bulldozers, forcing their vision ahead amidst great disapproval by the church leadership. I knew this type of leadership would be ineffective and I sought to create a more collaborative environment. By creating a more collaborative environment we were able to build trust among our team members and with the congregation. With a higher level of trust, our team was able to make comments and suggestions to one another that may have otherwise been disregarded or opposed, guiding the group in new and exciting directions. This trust also allowed every person on the SPT to feel valued and heard. As the team leader I would follow-up each meeting with an email to our team, inviting members to send me direct feedback or criticism regarding the previous night's meeting. I invited team members to offer any additional suggestions that they hoped to make, but may not have been allowed the necessary time, regarding the strategic plan. By creating more opportunities for team members to provide feedback directly to me, the team leader, I was able to avoid any

confrontation that might have occurred at the meetings. Additionally, our team members were thankful for the method I chose to introduce new concepts and ideas in relation to our strategic areas of focus. By reaching out individually to team members we were also able to keep our meetings shorter in duration.

After our first meeting I realized just how limited our time together would be. Each of our team members was busy and only had a certain amount of time each month to dedicate to this process, and I worked hard to honor everyone's schedules. This posed a challenge for developing an in-depth strategic plan, so I had to think of ways to save time during our planning meetings. The most effective method I discovered was to produce outlines or simple drafts of each section of our plan, as well as the concepts and ideas that informed these suggestions and share them with team members prior to each meeting. Providing these suggestions and ideas ahead of time gave our team something to work with and build on when we arrived instead of starting from scratch at the beginning of each meeting. For example, I wrote an initial draft of our mission and vision statements, based on the feedback I received in the SWOT analyses and my own research on how to engage millennials. I shared this draft with our SPT prior to our planning meeting and asked individuals to respond to my email with any feedback or suggestions. I then made a few tweaks based on the SPT's initial feedback, and the day before our meeting I prepared an updated version of our mission and vision statements to present to the team at our meeting. All of our team members were grateful for this method because it saved time and eliminated any unnecessary dialogue around writing the statements. At this particular meeting, we only spent about 15 minutes discussing the

mission and vision statements that were presented, we made a few small grammatical changes, and then we voted to ratify the new statements. This method gave us an opportunity to brainstorm and collaborate outside of the scheduled meeting time. Everyone appreciated this approach because it also fostered more casual conversations that took place after church each week or before bible study. These casual conversations cultivated a sense of excitement among our team members and other church members who were able to informally engage in the process.

After reflecting on how overcommitted most of our team members were and our collective desire to not implement new programs right away, we agreed to develop a simple plan that would provide a more long-term approach to how we hoped to grow. Ironically, our big vision for the future of EUMC was similar to John Wesley's vision for what the church could look like. In a sermon titled *Of the Church*, John Wesley proclaimed that, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men (people), in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered."¹²⁴ Upon sharing Wesley's view of the church with our SPT, we wondered aloud if church could really be so simple? As we began to embrace this line of thinking we were able to move away from the temptations of the attractional church model, which focuses on adding programs and changing worship styles to attract new members, towards a more historic and simple church model. This simple church model would be infused with our four theological concepts (hospitality, spiritual vitality, social engagement, theological

¹²⁴ Wesley, John, *The Works of John Wesley* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 396.

generosity) and would be implemented through three primary venues: weekly worship, small groups and individual relationships. This seemed more consistent with Wesley's original vision for the church, especially his small Methodist societies. Additionally, this vision of a simple church model focused on authentic relationships and spiritual connection seemed to mirror what millennials are looking for in a faith community. EUMC's new vision is built upon the idea that church is a place where individuals gather regularly to connect with God and with one another and become equipped to serve the world.

Our SPT is excited to begin the implementation of our strategic plan, and we are hopeful that our plan will help us address our goals of engaging millennials and increasing our knowledge of our Wesleyan heritage. One of the major themes we discovered in our research, that manifests itself throughout our four focus areas, was that millennials are becoming less interested in religious practice and more interested in the development of their own spirituality.¹²⁵ In fact, in a recent article published by the University of Virginia, Caroline Newman notes how the phrase "Spiritual but not religious" is growing in popularity among millennials. She goes on to share that, "This does not mean that millennials don't believe in God. There are a growing number of religiously unaffiliated millennials who still report believing in God, and even praying regularly, and many of these call themselves spiritual but not religious."¹²⁶ Ironically, the

¹²⁵ Caroline Newman, "Why Millennials Are Leaving Religion," University of Virginia, December 14, 2015, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/qa-why-millennials-are-leaving-religion-embracing-spirituality>.

same could be said of John Wesley. Arguably, his own evolution of faith began at Oxford when we established the Oxford Holy Club, which was a group of friends who were committed to avoiding any type of sin and reaching a state of religious perfection. Upon his spiritual conversation at Aldersgate, Wesley realized that this type of moral perfection is in fact impossible, and he began to embrace God's grace. This led him to preach a gospel of grace and to establish a church tradition that is based on the cultivation of relationships and social engagement. These are two primary elements that millennials are searching for in a faith community.

As Methodists, we seek to embrace and embody Wesley's commitment to a gospel of grace, and we are passionate about the pursuit of social justice. The fundamentals of our faith practice and our church tradition seemed to largely remain intact as we sought to bridge the gap between millennials and the Methodist church. Throughout our strategic planning process, we found that the foremost missing link in our chain of millennial engagement was our ability to find new ways to tell old stories. In other words, how could we effectively share our vision of church, one that is grounded in the Wesleyan tradition, with young people in this community? Throughout its history EUMC has maintained a strong desire to create a welcoming space, engage in social issues, encourage theological study and spiritual formation. Our team concluded that we must embrace new methods of sharing these values with young people in a language they could understand. In addition, we sought to find creative ways to include millennials in

¹²⁶ Caroline Newman, "Why Millennials Are Leaving Religion," University of Virginia, December 14, 2015, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/qa-why-millennials-are-leaving-religion-embracing-spirituality>.

our planning process. Some of the most effective methods we employed were by inviting college students to provide feedback to our strategic plan throughout the planning process. We also identified a few key students that could participate as we sought to update our online presence and our building's aesthetic.

As outlined in our strategic plan, the major changes that we sought were focused on changing our culture and sharing our story more effectively with young people in our community. Through our research and study of the Wesleyan tradition we all felt confident that the EUMC could be more effective in our mission to engage millennials if we remain grounded in our tradition. However, we quickly realized that we had done a poor job of sharing our Wesleyan heritage with college students and young families. In light of this, our SPT suggested immediate website and social media updates, a fresh look for our historic building, and a more intentional focus on our Wesleyan heritage during sermons and weekly worship, among other things. These elements were approved primarily because they provided us with an opportunity to tell the story of our church and faith tradition in new ways and did not require the addition of new programs to overtax our staff and volunteers.

While our SPT is excited about where our new plan might take us, many questions remain unanswered: Will our proposed shift in culture and practice produce a growth in the amount of young people engaging at EUMC? Is our strategic plan realistic and possibly replicable for other churches? Will the future of the UMC have an effect on our local church and ministry to Ellensburg? As the senior pastor of EUMC, my hope for this congregation is to foster a positive desire for growth, both in faith and ministry, and

an ability to adapt to the changing world around us, as we seek to rely on God's guidance and provision. Most importantly, we seek to remain faithful to God's call on our lives to love one another and to share God's message of radical love with the world. This has always been the mission of the UMC, and through this process our church has discovered that we do not have to change who we are in order to effectively reach a new generation of Christ followers. We must simply adopt new and more effective ways of sharing this mission with others.

APPENDIX A

EUMC STRATEGIC PLAN

2019–2021

MISSION

Our mission is to cultivate a welcoming space where all people can gather to connect with God and one another through worship and service.

VISION

At EUMC, we envision a vibrant and growing church where people of all ages and from all backgrounds gather regularly to worship and serve God.

We envision helping all people — young and old — to discover their God-given gifts and abilities so that they are equipped to participate in God's work of redemption in the world.

We envision a place where the outcast, the depressed, the marginalized and broken can find love, acceptance, hope and guidance.

We seek to be a community committed to prayer, theological study and local and global service.

GENEROUS HOSPITALITY

YEAR ONE: Provide name tags to volunteers on Sunday, be intentional about inviting attendees to coffee hour after church, paint the exterior of the church and make small improvements to interior, invite college students to participate in weekly worship service, provide a volunteer sign-up table after service, update website and social media to communicate our values more clearly and appeal to younger people

YEAR TWO: Sell parsonage to increase budget for renovations and improvement on church building, launch a new weeknight fellowship meal for community members, hire a children's minister to reach more young families

YEAR THREE: Renovate bathrooms and build showers that will be open for the homeless one-two days per week, renovate annex offices for use by other like-minded community organizations

SPIRITUAL VITALITY

YEAR ONE: Incorporate moments of silence during service, construct prayer wall in sanctuary, remove window shutters in narthex to increase natural light in atrium

YEAR TWO: Open sanctuary 2-3 days per week for prayer, launch a new vespers prayer service one night per week

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

YEAR ONE: Choose praise songs with a focus on justice, advertise how our church serves the community and be more intentional about announcing this at church/inviting people to participate, invite more millennials to participate in the leadership of the church

YEAR TWO: Develop more strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations, invite other service-oriented organizations to move into the available office space annex

YEAR THREE: Take a team from EUMC on an international mission trip

THEOLOGICAL GENEROSITY

YEAR ONE: Introduce aspects of Wesleyan theology in sermons and small group bible studies, invite a time of discussion after sermon and during coffee hour, include a short blurb in each weekly newsletter focused on a new element of Wesleyan theology

YEAR TWO: Introduce a "Methodist 101" class in the Spring, introduce a "Welcome to EUMC" class for new attendees Fall 2020

APPENDIX B

Sermon Notes

ME:

For ten years, from 2007 until about 2017, I had the privilege being an artist advocate, speaking and sharing at my concerts about orphan education in Africa. While my ultimate goal was to raise money for our scholarship programs, along the way I was able to introduce thousands of people to the great need that exists in sub-Saharan Africa and the lack of education for children with no parents. This experience taught me that advocacy requires conviction ... commitment ... and a deep understanding of the needs being addressed.

YOU:

Have you ever advocated for something? I'm certain that every person in this room has at some point. In his letter to Philemon, Paul is advocating for his friend Onesimus...

GOD: SET UP THE STORY:

Paul's letter to his old friend Philemon is likely the most personal letter included in the Biblical text. Paul immediately declares his identity and shares that he is not alone. His friend and co-worker Timothy is with him.

Then goes the traditional greeting from Paul and Timothy to Philemon and Apphia, perhaps Philemon's wife, and possibly their son Archippus. This family apparently hosts a church in their home, one that was most likely planted by Paul himself.

Philemon is clearly a dear friend of Paul's, belonging to the church of Christ and also apparently a slave owner.

Who is Onesimus? Onesimus is Philemon's runaway slave who met Paul in Rome and began following Christ under the mentorship of the Apostle Paul. Legally, Onesimus is the property of Philemon with no rights of his own.

Paul begins this letter by praising Philemon and his great faith and commitment to Christ. You might say that Paul is buttering him up for the big favor he is about to ask. That's certainly what it seems like to me!

Have you heard of the "Compliment sandwich?" Paul is essentially employing this method: Praise, challenge/critique, praise.

We also can't forget to mention that this letter is a testament to Onesimus's extreme courage — what slave would willingly return to his master unless he had immense faith in the one making the request, that is Paul?

What's in it for Onesimus? The assurance that he is no longer a slave but a brother in Christ, as Paul so clearly states in his letter. However, Onesimus must trust Paul's authority and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Philemon. This also requires great faith on the part of Onesimus!

Paul's letter to Philemon essentially serves three functions:

1. A PICTURE OF GRACE:

A. As Christ acts as a mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), Paul is acting as a mediator between Onesimus the slave, who has no rights, and Philemon the slave owner — Paul is offering to pay Onesimus's debt

B. As Martin Luther puts it, "We are all God's Onesimus" ... "What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon."

Paul is standing in the gap between not only Onesimus and his owner Philemon, but also between the institution of slavery and freedom, much like Christ stands in the gap for us between death and life.

C. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism famously declared that there are three types of grace:

1. Prevenient grace — grace working since before time began
2. Sanctifying grace — the ongoing work of God in our lives to draw us towards our true self in Christ
3. Justifying grace — the atoning work of Christ

1. AS AN ADVOCATE FOR FREEDOM:

A. Paul is advocating for the release of his friend and Christian brother Onesimus... "...if you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me." He's asking Philemon to see Onesimus as an equal, a brother.

B. Paul is clearly taking on the role of advocate for an individual that has no voice in society. Onesimus is helpless, property of Philemon and a man with absolutely zero rights in society, and Paul is writing on his behalf, most likely ensuring a bright future for this young man whom Paul has apparently "adopted."

C. History has proven this to be true as we will find out later what happened to Onesimus

D. This letter has larger implications — Paul is making a public statement against slavery

2. AS A CHALLENGE TO PHILEMON:

A. Proof of faith — Verse 21 — “having confidence in your obedience...” Paul is asking Philemon to prove his faith by embracing his brother Onesimus

In closing, as if to say “I’ll be checking up on you” Paul encourages Philemon to get a room ready for him as he plans to come visit soon! Haha!

“Where are they now?” —

Many scholars believe that Onesimus was set free by Philemon and later consecrated as a Bishop by the Apostles, going on to serve in Ephesus after Saint Timothy. Hence the icon on the front cover of your bulletin of Saint Onesimus.

“Onesimus in the Apostolical Canons [73], is said to have been emancipated by his master. The Apostolical Constitutions [7.46] state that he was consecrated by Paul, bishop of Berea, in Macedonia, and that he was martyred at Rome. Ignatius [Epistle to the Ephesians, 1], speaks of him as bishop of the Ephesians.”¹²⁷

Paul is writing as a respected faith leader on behalf of Onesimus who has no voice in society, requesting that he be set free, being held no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ.... And as we found out, he was!!

WE:

There are still many Onesimus’s in the world today. Those individuals who have no voice or no rights in our society.

¹²⁷ Bible Hub. “Philoxenia.” Translations. Last Modified 2019.
<https://biblehub.com/greek/5381.htm>.

Immigrants, minorities, the poor, the homeless...

Paul's letter offers a challenge for us...

How will we, the church, speak up for those with no voice? How will we stand in the gap today?

Let's pray.

APPENDIX C

Small Group Format to Increase Knowledge of Wesleyan Theology

EUMC Monday Night Fellowship Guidelines

Healthy dialogue around theological, social, political and cultural issues was foundational to the life and ministry of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Instead of delving into these discussions on Sunday mornings, Wesley utilized weeknight class meetings to go deeper into the biblical texts, as well as discussing pressing issues facing culture and society. Wesley was passionate about theological study and he worked hard to put his theology into practice.

In some ways, theology is thinking together about our faith and discipleship, reflecting with others in the Christian community about the good news of God's love in Christ. But how shall we go about our theological task so that our beliefs are true to the gospel and helpful in our lives? In John Wesley's balanced and rigorous ways for thinking through Christian doctrine, we find four major sources or criteria, each dependent upon one another. These we often call our Theological Guidelines: Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason.¹²⁸

The goal of Monday Night Fellowship (MNF) is to grow in community as we spend time studying and discussing the scriptures and examining issues that we are facing in our world today. We hope to learn from one another as we share our various perspectives and views. And at times, we must allow ourselves to "agree to disagree" on certain issues, maintaining a mutual respect for one another.

¹²⁸ St. Matthews United Methodist Church, "United Methodist Church Beliefs," Last modified 2020, <https://www.stmatthewsvf.org/united-methodist-church-beliefs>.

At MNF, we will gather as a large group first for a brief time of fellowship and a recap of the previous week's message. Then, we will split into smaller groups (randomly chosen each week so we can meet new people) and utilize the theological guidelines to take a deep dive into a passage of scripture. Most likely, we will examine the passage of scripture that was taught on the previous Sunday. Here's how it might work:

Biblical Text: 1 Timothy 6

Introduce yourselves to your group mates. Consider sharing a fun fact about yourself.

Then read the passage aloud as a group.

These questions are just suggestions, and you don't have to answer all the questions.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we be intentional about living "Godly" lives? (Living in such a way that reflects the nature of Christ)
2. How can we be intentional about living generously? In other words, how can we trust God to provide what we NEED and then be generous with the rest?

Scripture:

1. What was the original context for this Scripture passage? Who wrote it and who were they writing to? When was it written? (You can use your phone to look this up if needed)
2. How might the translation affect our interpretation? Compare the provided various translations among group members.

Tradition:

1. What religious traditions or cultures is the writer of this passage influenced by?

2. How does this passage affirm or conflict with the traditions in your church or family?

Experience:

1. What was the author of this passage experiencing at the time of its writing?

2. What did this passage mean for the first readers?

3. How is this passage similar or different than your own experience of God?

Reason:

1. How does this logic inform your own ways of thinking?

2. What are some ways you could apply this meaning of this passage to your own life?

* Conclude the discussion by asking everyone to answer this question:

After reading and discussing this passage, one thing that challenged me was

_____.

Pray to end your time together. Instead of offering prayer “requests,” consider inviting each person to present a need that someone else or somewhere else is facing today. Thus, we shift our focus from praying exclusively for our own needs to praying for the needs of others.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

