



*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

*Romans 12:2*

*December 2020*

## Covenant United Methodist Church

### High Point, North Carolina

The Western North Carolina Conference Discovery Weekend Team would like to thank the Reverend Darren Alexander and the entire congregation of Covenant United Methodist Church for your hospitality and for the privilege of partnering with you. Our prayer is that God will use this process to maximize the potential of your congregation as you seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We submit this report to you, which reflects several strengths that Covenant UMC employs for successful ministry, some opportunities to improve the ministry of the church, and three recommendations that we believe God is calling Covenant to fulfill for future, fruitful ministry.

# Strengths

## **1. A congregation that cares well for each other, has a missional heart, and has talented laity.**

People shared with our team about Covenant being a place where people feel loved and cared for. When needs are identified, the congregation is quick to respond to meet those needs. The congregation is described as open to new ideas and creativity. Many have participated in outreach missions to the community that include the backpack ministry to Triangle Lake School and Irving Park School; the partnership with Southwest Guilford Elementary, Johnson Street and Northwood Elementary; Block Party and Vacation Bible School at Ward Street Mission; a community garden, Faith Friends Camp, and the Open-Door Shelter. Many expressed desires to do more community outreach.

## **2. A great location with substantial property in an area of population growth.**

Covenant is strategically located in the Northeast High Point area of rapid growth. At the intersections of Skeet Club Road and Highway 68 the church has high visibility for thousands of people each day. The church owns non-contiguous 36.3 acres of land plus the half acre where the parsonage was built. There are a multitude of restaurants, shopping, grocery stores, subdivisions, senior living facilities, and community recreation located near the church.

## **3. Strong Children's and Youth Ministries.**

Families have been drawn to Covenant through their strong children's and youth ministries, Scouting programs, and a Day Care, Pre-School and After School programs. The youth numbered over 100 each week prior to the pandemic and connections with those youth have continued despite not being able to gather at the church building. The youth program has a history of nurturing youth in Christian Discipleship and giving them hands-on missional experiences at Ward Street Mission, among others.

# Growth Opportunities

## **1. Celebrate diversity while unifying around a focused calling from God.**

Covenant has grown significantly since its founding in 1989. The current average worship before the Covid Pandemic was 344 in three worship services, two of which are traditional, and one is contemporary in style. This kind of diversity in worship styles is desirable in churches this size as it recognizes that people experience the holy in a variety of ways with music often being the defining characteristic. The contemporary worship service was established at Covenant in 2000 but is still referred to by many we interviewed as the "step-child," even though it accounts for 50% of the weekly worship attendance. The Day Care and Pre-School programs at Covenant reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of Covenant's parish but the current congregation does not. Representation on the church's Leadership Council does not reflect the age diversity of the congregation or the three worship services. Women hold few church leadership offices, and the current worship leadership is by white males.

People our team talked with expressed frustration about a lack of focus at Covenant. Staff are described as operating in silos, communication among them is lacking, and the congregation tends to start new programs or events but do not follow through with them to completion and with celebration. In fairness to the staff, people also noted that the staff are overworked and expected to take the initiative to make things happen. A culture of a called, gifted, equipped, and empowered laity seems absent. While people appreciate the ministries for children and youth, they noted the absence of connections and opportunities for Adults. Small groups are not designed to multiply. Discipleship lacks emphasis. However, concrete steps have been taken in the past year and work has been done on clarifying where Covenant feels called by God to take its next steps and the time seems ripe to complete those conversations and step into your future. Laity have expressed their desires to be more accountable and missional.

## **2. Aligning staffing and the equipping and empowerment of lay ministry with the church's God revealed focus.**

We know that for a church to continue to be healthy and effective it must follow a clear, compelling vision that the Pastor and Lay Leaders prayerfully discern from God. Jesus gave us our mission when he gave us his Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20: *“And Jesus said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”*

A church's vision, or focus, is the series of word pictures they articulate of what the church will look like when they are truly going out, making disciples, bringing people to a relationship with Christ through baptism, receiving people into the family of the church, teaching people the commandments of Jesus, and helping them live knowing Christ is present and active in their lives. How will Covenant go into neighborhoods, through the state, the nation and the world living as Christ followers and offering His salvation good news to others? How will we make sure people are not only brought into our fellowship, but they are nurtured and taught to live and witness as a Christian? Who will look at you and see the examples of the living Christ in all that you do and say? These are the kinds of questions all churches should wrestle with continually.

Staff need competency-based job descriptions and understand core ministry team competencies expected in their interactions. A shift in practice from doing so much of the ministries to equipping and empowering lay leaders and all laity to do ministry is critical. Laity need training and District opportunities are available for church officers, and for all laity, in the Lay Servant Ministry School held each year.

## **3. Maximizing the assets of your facilities and location.**

Many people noted the need to update the existing facilities and address the lack of adequate storage, the less than desirable upstairs location for the youth, and the ongoing lack of consensus about building a sanctuary. Covenant has retired its building debt and has multiple opportunities to strategize with the Northern Piedmont District to extend its missional reach in High Point. We recommend an open spirit to all that God may be doing. In a post-Covid world, churches who continue with an on-line presence as well as excellent in-person worship and ministries will be the ones who thrive. Covenant has already developed an online campus, putting it ahead of 95% of the churches in the WNCC. The church has amazing opportunities and now is the time to discern the best stewardship of all these gifts. It will be essential to carefully develop a clear focus, defined strategies

and supporting ministry structures. A complete review of benchmark financial plans, with attention to staffing levels and training of laity in their call to ministry is essential. All these actions lay the groundwork for leveraging future opportunities and witness.

## Recommendations

### 1. A Renewed Emphasis on Spiritual Growth

We heard an incredible passion for missions and a desire for more programs, but we did not hear about people's sense of their personal relationship with God through Christ or how they are maturing as a disciple. Discipleship can certainly include serving others, but we need to know why we serve in the name of Jesus and why that service should be based on having a genuine, caring relationship with those we serve. And being a Disciple means we follow Jesus not only in ways he served but in his behaviors of love, forgiveness, and compassion in our own homes, with our families, our neighbors, in how we do our business dealings, and how we treat people who are different from us. Discipleship is about growing closer to God through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can mentor new Christians and make a positive impact in all that we do.

**Action Recommended: The pastor with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Spiritual Growth Task Force who will work with a trained Transformation Journey Guide to design a Discipleship Pathway for Covenant to provide equipping and spiritual formation for all people from their first days as a new Christian to their life-long maturity as Disciples of Jesus.**

Suggested things for this Task Force to consider: Seek depth first, before breadth. Concentrate more on the spiritual growth of leaders, their next right steps, their apprenticeships of younger leaders. Do you give guests and prospective members a strong theological introduction to the "why" of your church? Who does these classes? Do new people meet enough lay leaders at the beginning of their journey here? Are there dramas/personalities that are getting in the way of your true work? Are there old habits that need to be broken so you can be the church in a new day? Are your dreams "human-sized" or God-sized? Read and study Ephesians as a congregation. Consider adding a second Sunday School and/or more small group learning opportunities to meet the spiritual formation needs of those who attend the 9:45 worship service and for those who choose to connect with the on-line campus throughout the week.

### 2. Improved Staff Alignment

Because your people and staff members shared with us their concerns and challenges around feeling separated, operating in silos, lacking focus and good communication, the **Action we recommend: The pastor with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Staff Alignment Task Force who will work with a trained Transformation Journey Guide to make recommendations to the Leadership Council regarding current staff organization and alignment to better support the existing staff while considering the possibilities of new staff positions and job descriptions. These decisions will be done in concert with the current church's work on its focus/vision and with the Staff Parish Relations Committee.**

Questions for this group to consider: Is your staff functioning as a team? Do they exhibit and act upon shared team competencies? Do they work productively, smartly? Is it time to

create future-oriented and goal-centered ministries? How will you keep your young staff encouraged, current in training, and not let them become disheartened? Consider making your staff more ethnically diverse. Consider your need for a contemporary music specialist. Your staff and your church can look like your preschool, and Day Care. A first way to do this is to make sure that worshippers see “themselves” on the stage. A woman should also be a part of worship leadership each week. Bring together a 21<sup>st</sup> century plan of adult spiritual formation with a new and future-oriented system of congregational care.

### **3. Focused, High Energy Discernment and Deep Prayer about Physical Decisions**

God is giving Covenant physical resources and opportunities, right now. How and why should you say, “yes” to these opportunities and to what should you say, “no?”

**Action Recommended: The pastor with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Building and Land Task Force to work prayerfully with a trained Transformation Journey Guide to discern how to respond to these opportunities. They will take their recommendations to the Leadership Council for final approval. This Task Force will work with the Church Trustees in their deliberations.**

**Questions to consider:** Do you really need a Sanctuary? Do you simply need to remodel and refresh the existing spaces? Consider much more conversation between the Trustees and Wesley CDC to create curb appeal to meet the redesigned Skeet Club Road. Ask Wesley CDC to help you think about all use of the land and consider developing a site plan for now and for the future. Continue to invest in and grow your online campus, online worship, social media presence, and bring all your communications under the same leadership team.

## **Next Steps**

- The congregation will hold at least **Two Town Hall Meetings** to discuss these recommendations.
- **Facilitators** for these Town Hall Meetings will be identified by the pastor in conjunction with the Discovery Team.
- The **members of the charge conference will vote on this report** at an official **called charge conference** led by the district superintendent.
- If approved by a **69.5% or more vote** of the official membership present, the Western North Carolina Conference Office of Church Development will designate trained Guides and partner with the church to implement these recommendations.
- If the recommendations do not pass, the Transformation Journey process will cease.

While the District Superintendents were given guidelines about what kind of churches to nominate to become Transformation Journey Churches, **the guideline about the pastor being expected to serve over the next 2-3 years while a Transformation Journey Church completes its process, does not bind the church to keeping its pastor, nor does it guarantee that the pastor will not have to move. The appointment decisions are made**

**each year by the Bishop and the Cabinet of Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.**

## **Respectfully Submitted by:**

- Rev. Dr. Nancy B. Rankin, retired elder and former District Superintendent; Coordinator of Transformation Journey; ICF Certified Leadership Coach
- Rev. Maria King, UMC Elder serving Lee's Chapel and Carraway UMC Churches in Greensboro and she is the Northern Piedmont District Vitality Associate
- Rev. Carl Manuel, UMC Elder serving as pastor of Midway UMC in Kannapolis.
- Bonnie Burkett, Layperson, and member of Oak Ridge UMC in Oak Ridge. State Farm Insurance Franchise Owner, Director of the Northern Piedmont District's Lay Servant Ministry School.
- Rev. Beverly Copley, UMC Elder and Northern Piedmont District Superintendent and Chief Missional Strategist
- Rev. Dan Pezet, Director of Church Development, Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.