

LUMC Discussion Group Summary

July 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 30 people participated in three different discussion groups during the month of June. Almost all were church and/or committee members. While it would've been wonderful to have more people attend, those who did came with open hearts, open minds and lots of great ideas. Overall, the three sessions were positive, uplifting, energizing opportunities to plan for the future of Laingsburg United Methodist Church.

The following themes rose to the top as those given the most consideration during the groups. Summarized, verbatim responses follow. If more than one person gave the same answer, it was not repeated in the lists.

- **Lack of Youth:** If there was one theme that was prevalent throughout the discussion groups, it was the concern over the lack of youth in our church. Members are concerned about how this will affect our future.
- **More Community Involvement:** People seem to like the fact that we're doing more in the community, and would like to see even more of it. Many ideas were offered.
- **Perception and definition of church match:** Similar words were used to describe both our personal perception of our church and how we define the word "church" overall. This is a good sign that we are following the "perception-is-reality" rule.
- **Many ministry and mission opportunities:** A variety of excellent ideas for new and expanded ministries and missions were shared. This is truly a church that wants to do God's work in a hands-on way.
- **Threats to church are many,** but not all within our control. We can work to improve things like a lacking sense of community, inadequate stewardship education and faltering youth involvement, but we can't do much about the economy, apathy, personal lack of time and the political/societal changes that are prevalent in our country today. There may be small steps we can take that will make a difference somehow, but what are our priorities?
- **Communication and outreach efforts are noticeable and appreciated:** Newsletter is well received though there are still glitches with delivery. There was a strong feeling that we desperately need to embrace more technology in order to streamline our systems and attract/retain youth and young adults. Some also feel we should supplement our external communication by increasing personal outreach (i.e. canvassing neighborhoods with door hangers).
- **Future vision is positive but guarded.** There are many things on the wish list for the next five and 10 years at LUMC, but some are concerned that lack of financial support and cooperation, as well as dwindling youth involvement, may stand in the way of success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Church council and committee chairs need to prayerfully review these findings and determine priorities for incorporating them. Clearly not all can be done at once – and some may not be appropriate at all – but there is sufficient fodder for the future.
2. Building committee should use this report as a guideline when considering plans for a new facility. The feedback it contains can be a valuable tool for determining how our improved building can function most efficiently.
3. Consider setting measurable goals for various programs and membership.
4. Conduct regular discussion groups to keep lines of communication open and gauge success of new initiatives.

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Words to describe LUMC

Traditional (same as 30 years ago)
Friendly
Family
Warm people
Lots of change
Hard-working people
Team-oriented
Successful
Talented people
Caring
Giving
Homey

Little country church
Good music for a small church
Comfortable
Working/Active (i.e. mission projects,
food bank, etc.)
Mission-minded
Relaxed services
Humorous
Outreaching
Biblically based
Down to earth

Define "church"

Family
People
Backbone of community
Structure (physical)
Worship
Place to be with others who worship like me
Place to grow
God's place ("If I don't go, I have a bad week.")

Fellowship
Community of believers
Focused on Christ
Not just the four walls of the building; can
be anywhere and have a church
Building relationships
Communion

What are our ministries at LUMC?

Chicken dinner	Clown ministry
Quilting	Prayer chain
Christian Education	Bible study
Six special offerings annually	Breakfast for carnival workers
Missionary offerings	Trunk or Treat
Clothesline	Men's breakfast
Food bank	Looking Glass Community Services support
Seat Cover Project	Care Group
School bags	Bell choir
Funeral dinners	Creative Circle
Youth group	Shoebox Ministry
UMW and UMM	Choir
Prayer shawls	

What are potential ministries?

Men's breakfast (expansion of)
Nametags (pre-printed; leave on flat boards for weekly use)
High school youth
Handyman service
Young adults (18-35)
Meal assembly
Contemporary service to draw youth
Camps
Visiting shut-ins
Return of face-to-face funeral dinner planning/personalization of experience
Parish nursing (using retired nurses to do health checks, offer health resources, answer questions, etc.)
Nutrition and cooking classes
Activity center for youth
Teen center, even if not here at church
Evening youth service
Elementary after-school program
Wii leagues
VBS
Angel Food Ministry – monthly boxes of food for a small fee
Community education programs previously funded by school district
EWAP/MWAP – Evening/Morning Worship With a Purpose (women only; weekly)

What's missing?

People need to step out in faith more

Need to connect the dots between groups (i.e. UMW = quilting, funeral dinners, creative circle, etc.)

Brochure describing programs and ministries

Communication between groups

Music

Taking care of the church like you would your own home

Recording services for shut-ins

Greeters

Vacation Bible school

Prayer team for more intense, hands-on support

Prep for future growth; maintaining youth involvement

Regularly updated directory (doesn't have to be photo-oriented)

Welcome Wagon info

Children's bell choir

Page numbers in bulletin for Gloria Patri, Doxology, Lord's Prayer ("don't assume everybody knows these things by heart")

Sunday school classes for more ages

Trips/social opportunities outside the church (and for others besides Seasoned Citizens)

Grief recovery

Acolytes

Shut-in services

Twentysomethings

Camp promotions

Stewardship awareness/education

Membership classes and structured assimilation of new members

United vision and plan for addressing change

Strengths?

Dinners/food
Bible study
Discipleship
Praying for others
Welcoming new people
Using internal talent pool

Threats?

Lacking sense of community; don't know most peoples' names
Core group involved in mostly everything; some are burned out
Need to keep elders involved without them thinking they have to lead everything
Need more cooperation
Too much gossip/"behind-the-back talking"
Lack of youth involvement
Senior citizens are lost
Societal and political changes
Apathy
Economy
Poor tithing
Hypocrisy (real and perceived)
"Church is not center of peoples' lives anymore." (Lack of spiritual prioritization)
Lack of commitment to community service
Traditional structure/Too much focus on "old way"
Mobile youth
Lack of music
Empty seats
Ignoring technology
Lack of time/fatigue
Social demands/people overextended
Ministry not connected to passion
Stewardship not emphasized

Other activities for members?

Pizza/movie/game night; popcorn sales by youth
More youth trips and fundraisers
Adult mission trips
Pancake breakfast involvement
Ice cream social
Hobby night (“showcase what people do that we might not know about”)
Friendship “rings” – small groups mostly together for social, prayer time
Young couples group
Ongoing adult Bible study

Other outreach/communication opportunities?

Despite attempts to communicate, people still don't know who does what
Need better first impression
How about nametags?
Announce coffee hour every week (verbally) to remind people, especially those who are new
Monthly “communication” potluck
Business directory (for members who have services to promote)
“Salt the food”: plant ideas and ask for feedback
Services in McClintock Park
Brochure
Neighborhood canvassing/door knob hangers (used to do this)
Community presence through sponsorships, volunteering
Bible story booth/tent at local events
MySpace/You Tube blog
Summaries of committee and church council meetings on Web, in newsletter, etc.
Newsletter accessible to more people electronically (“still too many people don't receive it or can't download it”)
Directories in pews
Emphasize that all committee and board meetings are open
Move Web site address to more prominent place in bulletin
More media relations
Use newsletter articles for bulletin filler as needed
Names of current ushers in bulletin (not those for next month)
Better organize bulletin

Five-year vision

Congregation growing spiritually
Doors still open (“still there”)
Bring more unsaved people through the door
Salvation plan preached more often
More compassion
(Continue to be) the church that cares
Ongoing discussion groups with increased participation
More young couples and children (“need to build our future”)
Increased community involvement
Still Biblically based
Looking beyond our own doors for missions
Financially solvent
More youth
Two services
New sanctuary
Increased attendance

Miscellaneous

People sit in same place every Sunday
Need to ask people to participate
Need to remember four mainstays of a church:

1. Love one another
2. Pray for one another
3. Lift each other up
4. Bear one another's burdens

“People are just as important as the preacher or other church leaders.”

“We should take care of our own first.”

Keep quilts local; stop sending to Lansing

Ministry defined as:

- Reaching out to community
- Above and beyond Sunday service
- Creating an environment to meet God
- Setting examples/witnessing

10-year vision

See inception of more new ideas
Less talk, more action
Know each other better
Stronger congregation
Young people still here
Still a Spotlight Church
Still financially solvent