



**Report for
Lebanon United Methodist Church**



November 10, 2019

The Weekend Innovation Team (WIT) expresses our gratitude to the Lebanon UMC staff and NLI leadership team. It has been an honor to share in this time of prayer and discernment together as we explored how God has blessed your congregation and the next level innovations of your ministry.

Strengths

1. People

The song we all know declares that “the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people”...and that holds true for Lebanon! Mystery worshippers, long-time members, and newer members alike agree: the people of Lebanon United Methodist Church are its greatest asset. Lebanon members have a heart to serve, they are dedicated, prayerful, loving, welcoming, caring, nurturing, supportive, and they are the reason there is such a “family feeling” in this place.

2. Identity/History/Stability

Multiple individuals observed that Lebanon has a small country church feel. In fact, your self-study focuses on the rich history of Lebanon’s development in this historically rural part of Hanover county. Members appreciate the heritage that is rooted here and readily adopt the tradition of engaging in mission outreach projects to help the less fortunate in this area and beyond. The church has been blessed with remarkable stability in worship and financial support, even as it supports a range of ministries that have developed through the years.

3. Youth ministry

Lebanon long has been a place that makes disciples of young people. A theme that was mentioned again and again is how vital the youth program here has been. In that vein, several observed how good it is that the program being developed now focuses on helping young persons deepen their understanding of the Scriptures and of God’s call on their lives.



4. Mission outreach

“Missions is a passion of this church”—that is how one person reflected on a theme we heard throughout our conversations. This obviously builds on the nature of the people who are Lebanon and follows from Christ’s call to care for the “least of these” in our midst. The people of Lebanon respond enthusiastically when a need is identified and regularly help underwrite over a dozen mission efforts even as they directly engage with CARITAS, ACES, Lebcamp, etc.

Challenges

1. Identity/History/Stability

Lebanon has experienced a stability that many churches would envy. The people of Lebanon appreciate that it offers a small country church “feel” even as the area around Lebanon is changing dramatically. Still, many of those we interviewed and who responded to questionnaires wondered out loud how Lebanon can expand its horizons as the population of Hanover grows along with socioeconomic and ethnic diversity. As one person put it, how can Lebanon “speak to the challenges of the world” today? Others concurred, stating that the church needs “to embrace positive change,” to go beyond what we have “always done it this way,” to “consider new ways to share God’s ministry,” and to adopt new “ways to reach out to the unchurched and to invite them to become part of Lebanon.”

2. Discipleship

When asked how Lebanon has helped individuals grow in their faith, respondents almost universally pointed to Sunday School classes, sermons, and Bible studies that helped them gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and of God’s call on their lives. Nonetheless, most observed that a need exists for the people of Lebanon to go deeper in their faith, that more opportunities should be offered to engage greater numbers in Bible studies and other small groups that enable the Lebanon family to draw a clearer connection between what they believe and how they live.



3. Leadership Development

Several individuals observed that some leadership positions in the church have gone unfilled. Many mentioned that Lebanon needs to engage greater numbers in the ministries of the church. Others pointed out that the interactions between staff and laity would be strengthened by greater attention to the gifts and graces each brings to the task at hand. Further, the church would benefit from a more deliberative process by which to identify and cultivate leadership within the church.

4. Visibility

Lebanon United Methodist Church is the “best kept secret” in this area--that is how one person described the visibility of the church, and many others chimed in with similar thoughts. Even though Lebanon is in a growing area of the Richmond metropolitan area, it is not located on a heavily-trafficked road. As a result, Lebanon is not as well-known as it needs to be if it is readily to tap into the growth of its surroundings.

Next Level Innovations

“To become a competent and compelling congregation in the twenty-first century is a very complex, messy, hard, culture-changing, and long process. It requires a great deal of prayer, endurance, hard work, dedication, risk, and tenacity.”

Bob Farr and Kay Kotan, *10 Prescriptions for a Healthy Church*, xv, 2015

A *kairos* moment

“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.” –Psalm 25:4

Lebanon is in a good place...and we sense that you are at a *kairos* moment, a time to move toward a great place! The church enjoys an enviable level of stability and cherishes its history as a welcoming country church. Even so, the world beyond the doors of Lebanon is rapidly changing and the members of the church therefore need prayerfully to discern what the future of Lebanon is to be.



A number of questions are in the forefront for Lebanon United Methodist Church. Where is God leading you? How are you being called to bear fruit for God's eternal kingdom in the years ahead? Does Lebanon wish to grow in depth and numerically? We believe Lebanon can do this without compromising its relational DNA. We also believe this will require a deliberate congregational decision, recognizing that faithfulness often requires choosing between risk and comfort.

This will occur at a Wesley Covenant service the first weekend in January of 2020, dedicating yourselves individually and corporately to the movement of God's Spirit as you discern the path for the future and a new, expanded vision for your church.

1. Establish a clear path

Building upon your NLI weekend, we recommend that Lebanon persist in a process of self-discovery to:

- reach consensus about the values that will guide your ministries into the future;
- determine the ways in which you will fulfill the mission of the church "to make disciples of Jesus Christ;"
- establish the vision of how Lebanon will reach out to transform the world; and
- settle on the strategies you will follow for doing so.

We encourage you to work with your mentor to guide you through this process.

2. Visibility

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"
—Romans 10:13-15

Lebanon United Methodist Church and its ministries are far too vital to be the "best-kept secret" of Hanover County. We recommend that a task force be formed to:

- determine the best means by which to publicize its ministries so that you reach the unchurched in your area, keeping in mind that the website is the front door of your church;



- examine how best to welcome visitors on Sunday morning. To this end, we would recommend that you look at the narthex with fresh eyes with the goal of making this an especially inviting space that encourages members and visitors alike to make connections and engage in ministry; then
- develop a procedure for following up with visitors, determining how to shepherd them toward engagement with ministry and membership.

3. Leadership development

“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” –Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

God has given Lebanon United Methodist Church all the resources needed to thrive into the future, yet it will not do so until the church has a more deliberate process for identifying and cultivating these gifts and graces. We recommend that the Committee on Lay Nominations and Leadership Development establish a process by which to identify and cultivate the gifts and passions of members of the church family, then to align these with the ministry needs of the church. The church should continue to make use of training programs offered by the district and conference to enable those in leadership positions to understand their roles and enhance their ability to fulfill them.

In light of the increased workload that these innovations will require, we recommend that Lebanon consider expanding administrative support to undergird the ministries of the church.

We further recommend that Lebanon consider sending the pastor along with key lay leaders and staff to the Leadership Institute sponsored by the Church of the Resurrection (or another program known to be similarly fruitful).



4. Discipleship

“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.” –Matthew 28:19-20

These words of Jesus, known as the “Great Commission,” guide the work of every local church within the United Methodist connection. As we listened to the people of Lebanon, we repeatedly heard the sentiment expressed by one who said, “the church needs to grow spiritually which then will lead more people to engage” in its ministries. Others noted that the people of Lebanon need to go deeper, to gain a richer understanding of the Scriptures so that they can draw the connections between what they believe and how they live, adding that Lebanon cannot thrive if its people do not address the challenges of the world beyond the doors of the sanctuary.

We therefore recommend that the pastor, Director of Christian Education, and leadership first define what “discipleship” means for this church family. We further recommend that the pastor, Director of Christian Education, and leadership develop a comprehensive discipleship program with the goal of having at least 75% of average worship attendance in weekly Bible study (this includes Sunday School).



Timeline

- January 5, 2020Wesley Covenant Service, reflecting congregational commitment to *kairos* moment
- January, 2020Pastor appoints Visibility Task Force to develop a marketing strategy, visitor and new member strategies
- Committee on Lay Nominations and Leadership Development initiates leadership development process
- Pastor and mentor begin process to establish a clear path for Lebanon's future
- February, 2020Pastor, Director of Christian Education, and other leaders develop definition of what "discipleship" means at Lebanon
- March, 2020Pastor, Director of Christian Education, and other leaders begin work on developing a comprehensive discipleship program
- May, 2020Visibility Task Force submits recommendations to Council
- Summer 2020Pastor, Director of Christian Education, and other leaders submit recommendations to Council for definition of "discipleship," and for a comprehensive discipleship program
- Fall 2020Pastor, mentor continue work on establishing a clear path
- September 2020.....Pastor, key leaders attend Leadership Institute at Church of the Resurrection (September 25-27, 2019)
- December 2020Pastor, mentor conclude work on establishing a clear path



Addendum

Worship: We heard some thoughts about worship that could benefit from further consideration, namely:

- The “meet and greet” time is too long;
- The level of staffing for the services seems out-of-line with attendance;
- There is a hunger for sermons and conversations that offer a Biblical, theological perspective for what some view as controversial topics. This could be especially important prior to General Conference 2020.

[An Addendum is something that the Weekend Innovations Team sees very clearly as part of the next level movement for the church, but did not hear as much from the congregation on the need for this as an innovation. Addenda are a suggestion from the team, with some specificity as to how the congregation might embrace this in the future. When you vote, this is merely a strong suggestion, not an innovation you vote to implement.]



Next Steps

Lebanon will hold Town Hall meetings within the next 30 days to discuss this report and recommended innovations. The dates for these town halls are as follows:

- Wednesday, November 13 at 7:00 p.m.
- Sunday, November 17, at 10:00 a.m.

The congregation will vote on this report at an official church conference led by the district superintendent on Wednesday, December 4 at 6:00 p.m. Everyone is invited to a dessert followed by the Called Church Conference and Charge Conference.

If the report and innovations are approved by a vote of 70% or more of the members present and voting, the NLI process will continue. Your mentor will assist your leadership in implementing these innovations.

If the report and innovations are rejected, the NLI process will be deemed complete. Your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded, and the resources of NLI will move on to other churches.

The church office will be closed on Monday, November 11 to offer space and a time of rest for the staff. We appreciate the hard work that has gone into making this weekend so successful.

Please feel free to share observations and comments in preparation for the upcoming Town Halls by emailing to nli@lebanonumc.org

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