

**CONSULTATION REPORT**  
**For**  
**Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, Austin, Texas**  
**September 16, 2012**

**GREETING AND INTRODUCTION**

We greet you in the name of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We, the consultation team, would like to thank the Pastors Charlie Baskin and Madeline Carrasco-Henners, the lay leadership, and congregation of Northwest Hills UMC for the invitation to consult with this part of Jesus Christ's body. We have read and digested the self-study document provided by the church leaders, reviewed the several outside consultant reports, conducted interviews with church staff members, the leadership group, and led a focus group with members of the congregation. Everyone cooperated with us and provided all the information we requested. Our prayer is that God will use this process to enhance the ministry of the Gospel in this part of the world.

**STRENGTHS**

**1. WELCOMING COMMUNITY**

The warm greeting is noteworthy as you welcome people in your midst. The mystery guests in the Faith Perceptions Report confirmed the warm and welcoming atmosphere of Northwest Hills UMC.

**2. SPACE, FACILITIES, AND PROPERTY**

The church is located in a visible, high traffic location near schools and the Mopac/183 interchange that makes it a strategic ministry hub amidst an emergent and diverse population. The church is in an excellent location for impacting the community in greater ways. Parking is adequate and the building space is more than adequate for increased growth and enhanced ministry. The Family Life Center can be particularly useful for new ministries and worship opportunities for youth and young adults.

**3. DEDICATED, COMMITTED CORE OF LAITY AND STAFF**

Northwest Hills UMC has a dedicated staff and a core group of leaders willing to give much time and effort for the activities of the church. The church ministries are resourced with talented and skilled people. Their experience, gifts and grace enable the church's many activities, and offer the possibility of living more fully into God's vision for Northwest Hills UMC.

**4. ACTIVE SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

There is an emphasis on Spiritual Formation in adult Sunday school classes and other small groups which include Stephen Ministry, Emmaus, Prayer Team, Disciple Bible Studies, Music Programs, etc.

**5. DESIRE TO CONNECT WITH THE MISSION FIELD**

We heard several groups desire more cultural, generational and ethnic/racial inclusivity and an overall desire to reach out to all the residents in the Northwest Hills area. There is a strong desire to grow in outreach, worship, and mission that is relevant to the needs of the community.

**CONCERNS**

**1. LACK OF CLEAR SHARED MISSION AND VISION**

Northwest Hills UMC has no clear shared vision and purpose that unifies the staff and the congregation and the direction of its ministry. The ministries of the church are not aligned to any single unifying purpose, and therefore this congregation is not producing the fruit of discipleship, nor new transformations to Christ with any degree of regularity or consistency. Relatively few people are becoming new disciples of Jesus Christ in any given year. A clear mission and vision inspires trust. When there is no clarity around the mission and vision, ministries cannot be aligned. There is no basis for discernment of program and staff priorities. And, there is a lack of continuing motivation to complete tasks to which the congregation has already made commitment. It is also hard to attract and develop new leaders or use the ones we already have. This lack of

clarity also affects the overall level of commitment and financial giving. When the congregation cannot clearly articulate its mission and vision, there is an overall inability to utilize its full potential.

## 2. SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE

There are several concerns about the energy and composition of existing worship services. There needs to be a WOW factor on Sunday Morning if Northwest Hills UMC is going to appeal to a younger and more diverse audience. Most of the mystery guest worshipers commented that both worship services lacked vitality, relevancy, and diversity. They did not feel challenged or inspired and thus would not return.

## 3. LACK OF CLEAR AND CONSISTENT OUTWARD FOCUS

Although there are some examples of a desire to reach out to the community (e.g., My Friend's House, the Scouting ministry, Friends of the Music and Arts) there is not a clear and consistent strategy on leading people touched by those ministries to be connected to Christ and the church. We have witnessed no intentional evangelistic outreach plan for the neighborhood. There is a lack of engaging and hands-on mission outreach.

## 4. LACK OF A CLEAR CONNECTION FOR EACH MINISTRY

Although you have a vision statement "*Offering God's Love...Building Believers*", it is limited and there is a lack of alignment and focus to the mission of transformation. Furthermore, the congregation has learned to depend too much on staff to "do" ministry instead of expecting them to "lead" the members in ministry. There are no established objective criteria for evaluating effectiveness and fruitfulness of staff ministry and ministries. Any evaluations are done on an emotional and personal basis, including evaluations of ministries. We have observed signs of staff and leadership burnout. Staff and leadership have no guidelines for discernment of priorities in ministry, and thus feel pulled in all directions. With no clear connection between vision and ministries, congregations often experience conflict.

## 5. LACK OF CLEAR AND CONSISTENT DISCIPLING PROCESS

Although there are several important pieces of the discipleship process already in place, and/or being developed, the components are not consistent or comprehensive. There is no clearly organized system of growing disciples of Jesus Christ. Serious consideration needs to be given to the attracting, inviting, welcoming, responding, listening, connecting, discipling, joining and equipping for ministries of this congregation.

## PRESCRIPTIONS

To make it easier to follow we have added some of the most common questions that arose at the first and second Town Hall Meetings, Sunday, September 23 and Thursday September 27 in boxes below each prescription. The responses were developed in conversation with Dr. Ruben Saenz, Executive Director of the SWTX Conference office for Healthy Church Transformation, who was a member of the HCI Team that developed the HCI Consultation Report.

## 1. DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED MISSION AND VISION

Should this consultation report be accepted, the congregation will take as its mission statement, "***The mission of Northwest Hills UMC is to make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.***" This means that every ministry in the congregation must demonstrate how it will accomplish the mission and that new ministries need to have as their primary purpose the "*making of new disciples.*"

The Senior Pastor is to call the staff, leaders, and congregation to a Day of Prayer and Repentance. The first purpose is to have a day of confession, asking God to forgive the congregation collectively and individually for not marshaling its resources to lead many more people to Jesus Christ. This Sunday of prayer and worship will be led by a conference facilitator who will lead the congregation in prayers, collectively and individually. Time should also be given for those who have unresolved issues with someone in the church. Whatever the chasm, they are to go confess and seek forgiveness. It will also be understood that after this day we have moved forward from the past and will no longer be troubled by these issues. The second purpose of this day is to ask God to give this congregation a vision for reaching the community in which it exists. All kinds

of media and means might be used to enable people to pray. The congregation will ask God to open the hearts of the people for the many un-churched surrounding our area, many of whom do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is important for the congregation as it moves forward to turn their hearts spiritually towards God. This day of prayer for confession and healing will occur by **October 28, 2012.**

The coach will conduct a Day of Envisioning for the congregation. The purpose of this day is to dream of how God might want to work through the congregation both individually and collectively to reach this community. This day will occur on **November 17, 2012.** Following this day, the senior pastor in conjunction with the coach, will develop a vision statement in consultation with the Church Council. Upon confirmation of this statement by the Church Council, this statement will be presented to the congregation by **January 6, 2013.**

*a. Will church members have a chance to see the vision statement prior to voting on it at the church conference?*

The process for developing a new vision statement involves a Day of Envisioning in which the entire congregation is encouraged to participate. We all will be encouraged to "dream" of how God might want to work through Northwest Hills to reach this community and to accomplish His purpose through us. The senior pastor will then take the information that is developed and work with the coach (Ralph Mann) to distill those ideas into a meaningful, yet concise statement. That statement will then be presented to the Church Council for ratification.

The intent is not to bring it back to the general congregation a second time, but to let the leadership (Church Council) make the final decision. Returning the statement to the congregation would be a cumbersome, inefficient process which would remove decision-making from the leadership group that has been elected to make such decisions for the church. Furthermore, it would invite the development of multiple visions, potentially leading to di-vision within the church.

*b. Is it ratified by the church council only or is some other group/ratification needed?*

See answer to 1.a.

*c. The tone of the paragraph calling for a Day of Prayer and Repentance appears rather harsh and seems like it could be better worded to have people approach the process with enthusiasm rather than solely confession and repentance.*

The prescription for a Day of Prayer and Repentance is not intended to be negative or harsh. Rather, the Day of Prayer and Repentance is to be an honest acknowledgement of the church's failure to live up to the commission Jesus gave to it. It also is intended to help the congregation openly and honestly address its past hurts and divisions and then to present an opportunity for healing and reconciliation. All of which is necessary for a truly "healthy church." The objective of this prescription is to enable a deep healing to occur, which should then lead to a genuine, heart-felt enthusiasm.

The prescription for a Day of Prayer and Repentance is prescribed for each church going through the Healthy Church Initiative. It is meant to provide an opportunity to address any unresolved issues that may still remain.

*d. "Transformation of the world" is a rather large mission field – does it dismiss the local community?*

The mission statement proposed in this prescription is patterned after the mission statement of the United Methodist Church. The intent is to bring the churches into

alignment with the denomination so we all are “on the same page;” that is, so we all are working toward a shared mission – the one Jesus gave His disciples.

“Transformation of the world” is indeed a large mission, but it is the one He has given us: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matthew 28:19) And no, the statement does not dismiss the local community, for they are a part of the world we are to reach. We are to reach the world *with* and *through* them (our neighbors).

## 2. WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

Upon acceptance of this report, a task force composed of the pastors, the Director of Music Ministries, the Contemporary Worship Leader, and 3-5 representative people appointed by the Senior Pastor in consultation with the coach will be formed for the purpose of enhancing the Sunday morning worship experience. This task force will be formed by **January 15, 2013**. This task force will research new worship ideas by visiting 4-5 churches, looking for excellence in music, preaching, style, technology and other avenues of enhanced worship. The task force will study the Faith Perceptions Report in order to address the feedback from the recent mystery guests. The objective is enhanced worship. This task force will evaluate current worship planning, staffing, and music, making necessary changes to bring about excellence at all worship services. This may require the consideration of new and/or reallocation of resources, new worship times, and new worship spaces in order to reach the mission field. This task force will report recommendations to the Church Council by **April 1, 2013**.

*a. Is there more information available about this task force? Will the task force alone make all the decisions about the worship experience?*

No, at this time there is not more information available about this task force other than what is presented in the prescription. The prescription calls for the task force to present its recommendations to the Church Council for approval.

*b. What is the process that will be used to define these new worship services? Will we be inclusive of comments from everyone?*

This question presupposes that the task group will recommend new worship services. Yet this potential is only one of many areas the task group will be charged with exploring. The overall objective is to “enhance the Sunday morning worship experience” through seeking excellence in preaching, music, style, technology ... that is, in everything we do. It is anticipated that input from the congregation will be sought in this entire process. However, it should be remembered that Sunday morning worship is not just about this congregation’s preferences, but also about reaching and connecting with the people who have not yet encountered Christ.

*c. What if we feel that our worship services are great the way they are?*

We need to look at how we can improve or maybe there is some additional stuff that we can do to attract more people.

## 3. CONNECTING WITH THE MISSION FIELD

Within a 5 mile radius of the church, there are varied populations, ages, and cultures. In this area, there are a significant number of young families with children attending nearby schools and playing in sports leagues on the school playgrounds. Living in the apartment complexes, there is also a diversity of races, ethnicities, incomes, stages of life and other cultural distinctions. In response to this unique contextual reality, the senior pastor in consultation with the coach will appoint a team of lay people and staff to develop a significant strategy for reaching this mission field. This team will be developed by **February 1, 2013**, and will report to

the Church Council by **May 15, 2013**, with training, programs, and strategy to be implemented **by September 1, 2013**.

a. *Is The Mission Field the "local community" or really a 5 mile radius?*

This prescription refers to a 5-mile radius only to make the point that within a relatively short distance from the church is a tremendously diverse population. All of whom could be understood to be within our mission field – especially if we are to “make disciples of *all* nations.” This prescription calls for a team to develop a strategy to reach our mission field. Part of that process will be to define our “target” mission field.

b. *Will the process allow for a more specific definition of a mission field? Can the outline of the demographic map that we provided with our self-study be used?*

Yes, part of the process will be to define our mission field more specifically. See 3.a.

As a part of the Self-Study submitted to the HCI team in August, there were demographic surveys compiled using different parameters. One used a set radius of five miles; another used a radius of two miles. A third used the geographical boundaries encompassed by major highways (e.g. Mopac, 2222, 360, 183). The process allows flexibility for us to define our primary mission field. However, that will not prohibit us from reaching out to say, east Austin.

c. *Do we **not want** the people that are outside of the 5 mile radius?*

We are not saying that people that are not part of a defined “Mission Field” are not welcome at our church. Rather the idea is to define a “target mission field” that will better help us to do our mission and vision.

#### 4. **MINISTRY AUDIT, STAFF AUDIT, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Once this report is accepted, the church will move toward an accountability model of leadership. Staff and lay teams will set goals and be held accountable to fulfill those goals based on the mission and vision of the church. In this model the Church Council governs, the pastor leads, the staff (paid and unpaid) manage, and the congregation does “hands-on” ministry. This single board model will be fully implemented by **January 1, 2013**. “How to” resources for this transition will be provided working with the coach and using the book, *Winning on Purpose* by John Kaiser.

The Pastor and Lay Leader in consultation with the coach will appoint a multi-generational team and launch a ministry audit. The audit will be completed by **March 15, 2013**. The audit shall examine each ministry for how it aligns with the Mission and Vision of the church and produces results for the sake of the mission. Any ministry not aligned with the mission will be given one year to realign itself with the mission. Any aligned ministry that is not producing disciples will have an additional year to produce that fruit. The ministry audit will be transparent and available for all to review and provide movement for the direction of the church.

By **January 31, 2013**, the coach will lead the staff, SPRC and Church Council in a Leadership Retreat based on the books, *Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission* by John Kaiser and *Ultimately Responsible* by Sue Nelson Kibbey. The purpose of the retreat is to learn together the “Accountable Leadership Model” of how a board governs, how a pastor leads, how a staff manages, and how laity engage in ministry. Furthermore, a covenant of behavior and accountability will be adopted by the staff. The Church Council will work together to set church-wide goals and strategies that align with the mission and vision; these goals will be in place by **February 15, 2013**.

Then the pastors and staff will create new job descriptions with goals and alignment to the mission and vision of the church to be presented to the SPRC and Church Council by **June 1, 2013**. The staff will develop mission-

focused, results-based job descriptions and benchmarks and be evaluated for fruitfulness by the senior pastor. The senior pastor will conduct quarterly reviews of the fruitfulness of Northwest Hill's UMC's strategies and goals, going forward. SPRC will receive a copy of each review from the senior pastor. The SPRC will evaluate the senior pastor based on fruitfulness.

The primary focus of the staff will now be recruiting, equipping, and deploying laity for ministry. The pastor and coach will see that all the church's paid and unpaid staff develop an intentional system to multiply and develop leaders and teams. This will be completed by **June 1, 2013**.

This system may include the following:

- Existing staff and leaders recruiting new leaders and forming ministry teams;
- Recruitment will be based on gifts, talents, strengths, skills, and interests;
- Growth in leadership skills through study and practice of spiritual disciplines;
- Goal setting and accountability that furthers the church's mission and vision;
- Appropriate on-going training for all leaders and servants.

*a. Are there currently Methodist churches that use the single board model?*

Yes, there are many. Some very large United Methodist churches have been using a similar model for years. More recently (within the past five years) many UM churches have been switching to the single board model. Many of these have done so at the urging of the Healthy Church Initiative. It is our HCI Team's understanding that all of the churches in the Missouri Conference participating in the Healthy Church Initiative are being asked to adopt the single board model of governance. The reason is to provide a greater efficiency and flexibility of governance, while freeing more people for hands-on ministry, given the time limits many people face in their daily lives.

*b. Would members of the HCI group be willing to meet with a small group of members to help us understand how the single board model works?*

The HCI Team has provided us contact information for several churches that have undergone the transition from a model similar to ours to the single-board model. They have been contacted and we presently are awaiting responses to a number of detailed questions.

*c. How does the single board system work with the Book of Discipline and its descriptions of committees?*

The Book of Discipline actually has sufficient flexibility to accommodate various models of governance. For example, for each board or committee it establishes a range of the number of members that the committee must include. A single board can be structured to fall within these parameters. Additionally, the makeup of the single board would be arranged to meet the requirement for rotating classes of three-year duration. This provides a new influx of members each year, while also providing continuity of leadership from year to year.

*d. Concern was expressed about the potential of existing ministries being cut.*

The primary objective of Prescription 4 is to help the church move to an accountable model of leadership and ministry. It is really a matter of responsible leadership and ministry. If a business continued to pour resources into a division that consistently lost money year after year, we might question the responsibility of its actions. The rest of the divisions in that business would have to curtail their growth in order to make up for the failing division. As a result, the objective (or mission) of the entire business would

suffer. The church is not a business. Its "bottom line" is not money but people. Its mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the church overall has not been very good about managing its resources (people, energy, finances, etc.) with regard to meeting its mission. At its root it is a question of stewardship. Therefore, this prescription seeks to help NW Hills become more responsible in managing its efforts and energies to be in line with its main mission.

The main intent of this prescription is not to eliminate ministries, but to help align them with the church's mission. Certainly there are those ministries which are not primarily oriented toward "making new disciples." Many of those ministries are designed to be supportive ministries. So, the prescription calls for us to design a way in which we can assess those ministries to see if we can "tweak" them to be more deliberately in line with our mission. We already have examples within the church of how this is being done. Our prayer shawl ministry *could* be limited to providing shawls only to those within the church and their families. But, it is reaching out to provide love and comfort to hundreds of people beyond the church. The same is true for Stephen Ministry. We *could* limit the availability of Stephen Ministers only to those within the church. But that is not the case. This ministry already is reaching out in Jesus' name to dozens of people beyond the church. As one person suggested, we must have a strong internal discipleship program to support externally focused activities.

The challenge in this prescription is for us to look at *all* of our ministries to see how we might cause them to be more deliberate in reaching out to the world around us in Jesus' name, *so that* those around us will come to know of Jesus' love for them. If an activity is *not* able to be aligned with the church's mission, of course the question then arises: "*Should* we be doing it?" It doesn't mean the activity is bad or worthless, but if we are to be accountable to the Lord for what we do with what He provides us, we will be called upon to make choices. It is anticipated that very few ministries will fall into this category.

*e. Was this single board model suggested because of the size of the church and the number of meetings?*

It can help streamline the process and help things to happen more quickly. However it also means that the leadership will be in the hands of fewer people, which could be a concern. The rotating classes help with this issue (term limits).

*f. Does the single board allow for sub groups or sub committees?*

Yes, it definitely allows for short term sub committees.

*g. How will the ministry teams (our current Purpose team) work with this?*

We will have some flexibility in how we make this work. That is part of the plan that will be developed under this prescription.

*h. What are the ways that we will measure if a ministry is producing results?*

That process is part of what must be developed under this prescription. As already expressed, not every ministry can be evaluated in the same way.

*i. Are there ministries within the church that we already have plans to eliminate?*

There is no defined list of ministries that will be eliminated, but as stated above in 4d we must look at *all* of our ministries and assess them against our vision and mission. It is anticipated that very few ministries will actually be eliminated. Our goal will be to help all our ministries to align with our mission and vision.

#### 5. **DEVELOPING A CLEAR EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS**

The senior pastor, in consultation with the coach, will develop a 5-7 person team to create a clear evangelism and discipleship path for moving people from where they are on their spiritual journey to becoming a fully-devoted follower of Jesus Christ. The discipleship path will be a lifelong process designed for everyone, including non-believers or those maturing in faith. The discipleship path will align with our vision and encourage all persons to:

- connect and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ,
- be transformed by studying the Bible and principles of the Christian faith,
- connect with other believers for support and accountability, and
- be in service to others for the purpose of the mission.

Serious consideration needs to be given to the attracting, inviting, welcoming, responding, listening, connecting, discipling, joining and equipping ministries of this congregation. A resource could be *The Race to Reach Out*, by Doug Anderson and Mike Coyner. The team will report to the Church Council by **September 15, 2013**.

*a. When did we stop doing this? We have had United Methodist 101 classes etc. before.*

Northwest Hills UMC continues to offer a wide variety of studies, retreats, classes, etc. to help people in their spiritual growth (i.e. to grow in discipleship). The challenge of this prescription is for us to organize those offerings into a clear step-wise process to help people grow in their discipleship. The challenge also is to connect our outreach, welcome, hospitality and discipleship opportunities so that a person coming in the door for the first time might have a clear place to start and an understandable path through which they can be connected with others, encouraged in their growth, and helped to engage in a ministry that matches their gifts and passion.

Additionally, this process should be simple enough that everyone in the church (at least those who are active) has enough familiarity with it that they can help direct newcomers and acquaintances to the "place" that is right for them.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The consulting team wants to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation in this manner. Our prayers and hope is that God will use this process to help implement your mission effectively, create a compelling vision and make an eternal difference in the church's mission field for the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Team Members,

Rev. John McMullen, Retired Clergy, Austin

Dr. Ralph Mann, Sr. Pastor, Bulverde UMC

Dr. Ruben Saenz Jr, Ex. Director Healthy Church Transformation, SWTX Annual Conference

Rev. Teresa Welborn, Ex. Director of the Office for Clergy Development, SWTX Annual Conference

**Town Hall Meetings** (open forum to discuss HCI process and "prescriptions")

**Sunday, October 7, 2012 at 2:30pm**

**Church Conference:** Thursday, October 11, 2012 at 6:30 PM

(Church Conference convened by DS Steve Purdy to take formal action on "prescriptions" from weekend.)