
THE OPEN DOOR

United Methodist Church of the Open Door - Kennett Square



A Word from the Pastor

Fall is my absolute favorite season! I love a crisp, cool fall morning to go for a walk and listen to a book. I like it because everything is changing and oh! what amazing colors! I could pass the same tree on my block every single day and every day there is something different, something that has changed. Its simply glorious.

Church of the Open Door, we are in a season of change! We are discovering more and more that we have been held captive to our current building and that looking for a new place to meet is paramount for our transformation.

The leadership team under the direction of Rev. Dr. Hal Taussig, as our consultant has been working hard developing a strategic plan, that includes looking at our community and the communities around us. At identifying who we are spiritually, socially and what our identity is. We are going to be starting our second phase of this work together as we look at what our programs are currently and what programs should we be thinking about in order to meet our demographics needs. Its scary, its exciting and its challenging, but as you all shared this past Sunday at our congregational meeting, we need to move and do something because we cannot be held captive by fear.

The following is a report from our consultant for the entire congregation and gives you a summary of the leadership teams work up to now. I invite you to make a one on one appointment with me to discuss this report and if you have any questions or input that you would like to give. Please call my cell phone at 215-687-1368 or email me at office@umcod.org

Report and Worksheet from Strategic Planning 1/27/18-9/30/18

Results of Initial Internal Assessments of Local Church

1. Modest overall leadership potential with greatest strength in social justice and action. (1/27/18-4/8/18)
2. Finances: strong giving record for a small congregation, upper-middle income strength, some reserve funds, recent five-year lack of balanced budget.
3. Measuring level of fatigue in leadership and congregation: self assessment of recent history of fatigue and general sense in January, 2018, that good energy for growth remains

Demographic Study of Amoeba-Shape of 4-11 mile Area surrounding Current Church Building

1. Discovery of strong un-and-de-churched population 50+ in age, and upper-middle to upper income holding substantial social values in common with Church of the Open Door (American Royalty and Silver Sophisticates)
2. Discovery of 14% Latino, 3-4% African American population, 79% Caucasian
3. Discovery of low amounts of poverty, the vast majority of whom are Latino
4. Discovery of modest population growth of young families with similar values to population in #1

Limits and Foci of Four Strategic Planning Options with EPA Bishop, Cabinet, and Congregation

1.. After nine months of strategic planning, this particular option is still in play, and ready to be examined thoroughly through three months of programming design, church staff design, projections of costs and financial support. Reasons to project membership growth with creative and open-minded congregation include strong similar values and life styles among Open Door current members, "American Royalty," and "Silver Sophisticates," and to a lesser extent new young families; likelihood of financial means in such a growing congregation that would allow promotion of church and development of church staff; strong current pastoral skills and leadership; and lack of strong church competition for the un-churched target demographics that share social values with Open Door Church in the larger area around the church. As the strategic planning group has already begun to discuss, successful strategies nationally to attract such specific demographics point toward a worship program that is a hybrid between Christian and seeker styles, a diverse congregation and staff, ecological and meditative spiritual programming, eclectic music inside and outside worship, creative artistic performances, range of adult education including but not focused on religion, opportunities for social and environmental volunteering, community speakers programming, and a modicum of young children's liberal religious education programming. Development and launch of this strategic plan would require up-to-four-or-five months to launch its program and staff dimensions, after its final four-to-five months of strategic planning. Although there are strong reasons to develop such a direction, its success is not assured.

1. Hiatus: Recognizing Value of Current Congregational Membership, Resulting in 5 Year Plan of Stable Membership, little Membership Growth, Part-time Pastor, down-sized Church Plant, and Vibrant Celebration of Current Open Door Values.

After nine months of strategic planning, this particular option is still in play. It acknowledges the depth, values, meaning, and vibrancy of the current membership. It acknowledges also that the larger demographics of the surrounding area of the church do not reflect the intense devotion to social justice and strong Christian faith; and that therefore there is not strong reason to think that a congregation like the current Church of the Open Door can develop a larger membership. The basic current finances, leadership, and integrity of the church, however, can with relative ease undergird such a small and vibrant church. This “hiatus” strategic plan also recognizes the significant trauma of the church’s past 6-8 years as well as the fatigue within the congregation’s exceptional efforts during those years. Such a strategic plan would allow for times of deserved healing and renewal. It would allow Church of the Open Door to continue to be recognized for its unique stance in the world and its contributions to its community.

1. Church Closure: Resulting in Congregational Closure.

After nine months of strategic planning, this particular option is no longer in play.

1. Church Restart: Resulting in Closing of Current Congregation and Restarting a New Congregation

After nine months of strategic planning, this particular option is no longer in play.



WE ARE NOT ALONE! The entire denomination is going through a process of discernment and change. In 2019 delegates from across the connection, which means world wide will gather in St. Louis MO to discuss and vote on one of the three plans presented by the Commission on the Way Forward regarding human sexuality.

Those plans are:

- i. **The Traditional Plan:** Maintains the current Book of Discipline language and ban on homosexual ordination and same gender marriage. Establishes accountabilities for: bishops, pastors, and Boards of Ordained Ministry and encourages those who believe otherwise to seek a self governing church option. It places stricter penalties and discipline on pastors who break the covenant and rules regarding homosexuality and anyone who might come forward for ordained ministry and is a homosexual. Those churches that choose to be more inclusive will be encouraged to leave the denomination in order to form their own group.

2. **The One Church Plan:** Removes all the language in the Book of Discipline that bans homosexual ordination and same-gender marriage. No church or clergy is ever forced to act of their conscience. Churches can vote to choose whether they will become an inclusive congregation and accepting of homosexuals in the full life of the church including membership, leadership, candidacy, and recommendation for ordination, as well as whether they are willing to celebrate same sex marriages. The Central Conference (Africa and others) can keep their current BOD which places bans on homosexuality), Churches who want to exit the denomination must follow trust clause and pay for unfunded pension. Jurisdictions pay for their bishops.
3. **The Connectional Church Plan:** Replaces 5 US jurisdictions with 3 connectional conferences - that is it divides us up by traditional, unity and progressive. Central Conferences can form a 4th. Each of those would have their own Book of Discipline, bishops and administration. Each jurisdiction would have to vote to decide which conference they would like to join and conferences and churches can switch to other jurisdictions depending on their convictions.

Is your mind spinning yet? As a delegate of this annual conference preparing myself to head out to St. Louis in 2019, I want to be clear with you where I stand. First, I don't believe that Jesus would ever want us to vote on each other, but alas we are not perfect and there has to be some way of governance and so we do our best. Wesley said, we must move toward perfection in Christ and so this is a constant journey. In light of that, the history of our beloved denomination has some great moments to celebrate including the development and empowerment of the laity, the work of evangelism during the Great Awakening in this country, the mission work of Methodist Women, our theology of unmerited grace, our hymns and music, the warmth of the heart and the move of the Holy Spirit, the development of small groups/classes and societies that rocked this planet with the Good News of Jesus that called for a personal encounter that had outward implications as we worked with the poor, the widow, the orphan and the imprisoned. Wesley again said, there is no holiness save social holiness. We gave all of that and more to the world and we should be proud.

However, we are not without our serious flaws. The last time the entire denomination was going to split was over the issue of slavery. Yes, that's right! We were divided particularly in this country between groups of Methodist, and especially clergy who were themselves slave owners and who pastored slave owners and were unwilling to depart from them. Thanks be to God that our African American sisters and brothers did not give up on us, but stayed and worked, and pushed and challenged us until anti-slavery became a part of our discipline and we understood that it was incompatible with Christian teaching.

Then it was the issue of women in ministry. Although, women had leadership since the inception of Methodism and John Wesley himself appointed several women as class leaders and

preachers, we struggled to find an official place for women in the church. Did you know that it isn't until 1956 that women gain full clergy rights in the Methodist Church!?! Talk about a long struggle, and it is not over. Still the denomination struggles with paying women clergy equally as men and including women in the leadership of the entire church. But thank God that these brave women did not leave our church, but instead stayed and worked hard to transform our church. Although there are still places that still will not accept a women as a pastor, women keep coming for ordination because we believe that God's dream is bigger than our obstacles.

In 1968, when the Evangelical Brethren and Methodist Church merged, it was celebrated by everyone, except persons of color. Entire congregations that were either black or other were indeed segregated and placed in their own conference. It had deep ramifications in our own conference that are still being felt today, even after we have done away with what we used to call "central conferences" in the United States. It was and is the sin of racism, once again trying to divide us by race and nationality. But good folks stayed, both black and white, Latino and Native American. We stay because we believed in the vision of John Wesley and in the message of grace! We stay and work, and push and challenge because we are better together than we are apart. And we are still working and challenging institutional racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and all the other forms of oppression.

So, after all this do you think I am ready to give up on this church?! NOOOOOOOO! (I would have used another word in front of that "no" that starts with H) I love my church, I love the people of the United Methodist Church. I can't imagine being a church any other way, a church that lives and lets live, that thinks and lets others think. In an era of tribalism, polarization and deep division, the people called United Methodist can show the world a better way to live in tension, to work together even in our disagreements. We can show the world how to live together in a large tent and still be unified in purpose and mission. We only have to agree on but three things together: Do no harm. Do all the good that you can. Stay in Love with God.

If we commit ourselves to that, the rest should not, cannot, keep us from being a united body together. I will always continue to challenge the church I love to be fully inclusive, that all means all. I will continue to challenge it because I love the church that baptized my son and received him as a member through confirmation and now that he has identified himself as gay, I want to believe that this is the same church that will love and nurture him as he grows into all that God has intended for him. The United Methodist Church is our home. That's why I am voting for the One Church Plan as we continue to move toward full inclusion.

So everyone is changing but we are not alone. John Wesley also said this even on his death bed; "the best thing of all is that God is with us." That is indeed good news! I invite you to join me in prayer for UMCOD and for the United Methodist Church. Every morning at 7 a.m. for 5 to 8 min. of prayer. You can join me via phone by following the link:

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: <https://zoom.us/j/7418220851>

Or iPhone one-tap US: +16699006833,,7418220851# or +16468769923,,7418220851#

Or Telephone: Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location): US: +1 669 900 6833 or +1 646 876 9923 Meeting ID: 741 822 0851