

Gulf Cove United Methodist Church
Helping Everyone Meet, Know, and Serve Jesus

Vision Retreat
February 16, 2013
9:00am – 2:30pm

Attendees:

Rev. Dr. Don Nations	Vic Costello	Charles Hilton	Ken Priest
Rev. Dr. Bill Fisackerly	Ralph Cox	Mary Hilton	Justin Quibell
Rev. Ron Rivenbark	Larry Dalton	Lu Ann Joys	Jeanne Shrout
Doreen Alvarez	Roy Engler	Sarge Joys	Shirley Smith
JoyceMarie Bryant	Calvin Fish	Carol McGuire	Linda Starck
Maxine Burgess	Carole Fish	John McGuire	Rick Starck
Tippy Burgess	Scott Folsom	Dave Pentz	Dawn Tesauro
Marilyn Calladine	John Furtado	Gayla Pentz	Holly Woods
Ralph Calladine	Joyce Furtado	Joan Priest	Dana Hanson

This year's Vision Retreat was held at Placida Harbour Club, 11000 Placida Road. We extend a special "thank you" to Sarge and LuAnn Joys for arranging for us to use the facilities. The meeting opened with prayer by the Rev. Dr. Bill Fisackerly, followed by 30 minutes of silent scripture reading, meditation, and prayer.

The first item of business was presented by Rick Starck, **DNA PROGRESS REPORTS**. Rick reviewed the current DNA status of the church as outlined in documents which can be reviewed on-line at <http://www.gulfcoveumc.com/DNA.htm>:

- DNA Progress Report February 2, 2013
- DNA Related Extracts From 2012 Administrative Council Meetings
- Activity, Ministry & Support Directory

The second item of business was presented by Vic Costello, **GCUMC DEMOGRAPHICS**. He offered a wide variety of statistics relating to age, race, income-level, education, and careers.

DNA COACHING

The main focus of the retreat was presented by the Rev. Dr. Don Nations, founder of DNA Coaching. His presentation dealt with the growth and future focus of GCUMC as to ministries and number of attendees. Towards the end of the afternoon, he cautioned us to carefully share highlights of today's meeting so things are not taken out of context. Intentional steps must be taken so others feel welcomed into the process.

Some points made during the first part of his presentation include:

1. There are 34,000 United Methodist Churches, and half of all UMC churches have less than 58 worshippers. The average attendance of GCUMC is about 389. That puts GCUMC in the top 10% of all UMC churches, with the size and ability to be a leader.
2. Retirees are different now than they were 10-15 years ago: They are less likely to move when they retire. They now are less likely to have attended church. Of those who attend church, an increasing percentage goes to a contemporary service. They don't move to retirement communities like they used to do.
3. Our mission statement (helping everyone meet, know, and serve Jesus) indicates that our church is NOT primarily about: taking care of us, maintaining buildings, having property, making everything look pretty, making everybody happy.
4. Our sanctuary is functional, but not necessarily "fancy" or "traditional" with pews and stained glass windows. But as long as our worshippers are friendly and welcoming, it will help newcomers get past the appearance. Many new, upcoming churches are in warehouses, storefronts, and schools; they do not want to own property, only rent or lease.
5. Visiting worshippers' homes can be very insightful, not only in learning something about those individuals, but it also conveys to them that the church is concerned about them.
6. Our first-time guest follow-up is very limited. We should make our first contact within the first 36 hours, and 5 to 10 contacts within the first 30 days whether they come back or not.
7. There are times when building that building, having that debt, or trying to maintain 120 programs takes so much time, energy, and money, that there's nothing left to focus on the most important things.
8. If GCUMC really is about helping everyone meet, know, and serve Jesus, then that becomes the filter that creates the laser that gets all of the light moving in the same direction.
9. If everyone has the same focus, there may be differences of opinion, but once you enter the church, it's not about you or me. The church has already decided what its "opinion" will be: We should all be and only be about helping everyone meet, know, and serve Jesus. This should drive everything the church does.
10. The church entrusts a group of people to handle a particular matter or problem, and empowers them to make a choice. Once that decision is made, all others will love it -- regardless of our personal opinion. If the Ad Council takes an 11 to 4 vote on something, once they walk out of that room, it has become 15 to 0.
11. When considering whether to take on an activity or ministry, we should be able to quickly decide whether it fits into the mission statement of helping everyone to meet, know, and serve Jesus. If not, we should not be putting time or energy into it.
12. Every line-item request in the budget should fit neatly into the mission statement.
13. Our success criteria of a project should NOT be "if we hold it, we are successful." As an example, many times Vacation Bible School becomes day-care for individuals from other churches. If six months later no previously un-churched person attends GCUMC as a result of a connection made via VBS, then VBS did not meet the criteria of our mission statement.
14. Ideas for making VBS mission-statement successful include: recruiting children in un-churched areas; walking neighborhoods where lots of children live; having an end-of-summer VBS reunion; using VBS registrations as follow-up lists for contact purposes (such as keeping them apprised of upcoming programs and events at the church).

15. The mission of the United Methodist Church is “to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” GCUMC’s mission statement should align with the UMC’s mission statement.

EVERYONE

Who is meant by “everyone” in our mission statement? We must realize that no church is effective at reaching all age groups. We should consider that we have two target groups we can reach:

(1) People like us – generally over 50 and of a lighter hue (skin color). These people are more likely to continue coming to GCUMC. First-time visitors ask, “Do I see people who look like me?” and “Will I fit in?” They must feel comfortable in our church.

(2) New people, younger people, different people (“different” meaning un-churched, socio-economic status, racial background, ethnic background, etc.). In addition, the definition of “family” means something totally different than it did 50, or even 20, years ago.

A church’s best opportunity to reach people is to make just one cultural jump. The majority of our current congregation is “older churched people.” One cultural jump from our current demographic would be to:

- Older un-churched people: common history, experiences, ages, stage of life
- Churched people who are a little younger: empty nesters, people with older teenagers moving into the area; would involve upgrading website and technology, a good boomer-contemporary service

Trying to reach young un-churched people, or different ethnic groups, would be too many jumps and extremely difficult to achieve.

WORSHIP SERVICES

With regard to contemporary services, there are 100 flavors. But the major problem is that what most of our churches with boomers consider contemporary, most of our teenagers do not. What we mean by contemporary continues to evolve, and what you implement depends on who you are trying to reach – boomers, teenagers, or 18 to 25 year-old young adults. Being friendly and welcoming is nice, but it is different from having a service *designed* for a different demographic group.

With regard to blended services, traditional folks don’t think they are traditional enough, and contemporary folks don’t think they are contemporary enough. Typically, it is a traditional service with a swap-out of a few songs. Most churches that are seeing a huge growth in young adults under 40, with or without kids, do not have blended services. Their services tend to be

band-driven (with the band being semi-pro or pro); in a dark room; with a light show; live projection of the band on a huge screen; words on the bottom third of the huge screen; some radio-songs and some written in-house; a one-topic, very clear teaching sermon that is somewhat interactive and very engaging; the sermons are a series over a number of weeks and not from the lectionary. The whole service tends to last 60-90 minutes, typically 75. In these churches with their concert-like services and really skilled musicians, the people are more engaged in worship; they donate at a higher level; they are more likely to be involved in service projects and missions to their community and the world; and they have a higher percentage of small groups.

A general discussion was held on the best day and time to offer a service. If you are talking about young adults with no children, a service at 11:00 Sunday morning may be too early. Young adults with children elementary-age and younger currently seem to prefer services that start at 10:00 or 10:30, even though historically most contemporary services start at 9:00 or 9:30. Having worship on a day other than Sunday is fine, as long as you are reaching your target audience. You don't want to survey your current congregation, because they are already at church. You need to evaluate the demographics of your target group and ascertain what would best appeal to them.

WHOM DO WE WANT TO REACH

A survey was conducted of un-churched young adults, asking what they thought about church people. They responded that they thought most church people were hypocrites, judgmental, stick-in-the-mud, don't like change, look down their nose at you, and don't have fun. In comparison, the same survey was conducted of church young adults. Their responses were the same.

One perception is that the church is not clear about whom we want to reach, and we are not sure we really want to reach them. If the majority of people in the United States do not attend church on Sunday, where is the outcry from churches for those folks? We never ask whether those people have a personal relationship with Jesus, or if they have to experience life without Jesus.

What would happen if it was determined that, in an attempt to reach un-churched people, the absolute best time to offer a new worship service at GCUMC was at 10:30am Sunday morning? Rev. Nations stated that his father was also a minister who, at the age of 73, addressed his own congregation by submitting the following:

How many of you are over 50? ... The church is not about you. Get over it. It is about your children and your grandchildren. We've had our run. We've had our time in church. They're not going to steal our worship service away from us. They're not going to kick us out. But now is not time to say "What do I want in my service?" or "What do I like?" Instead say "What would it take to have my children and my grandchildren in church?" And if they're not here in this community, if they're in some other community, I'm praying that some church there bends over backward to make my children and

grandchildren welcome in church and reach out to them. So if I'm going to ask some grandparent do that for my kid, I need to do that for that grandparent's kid.

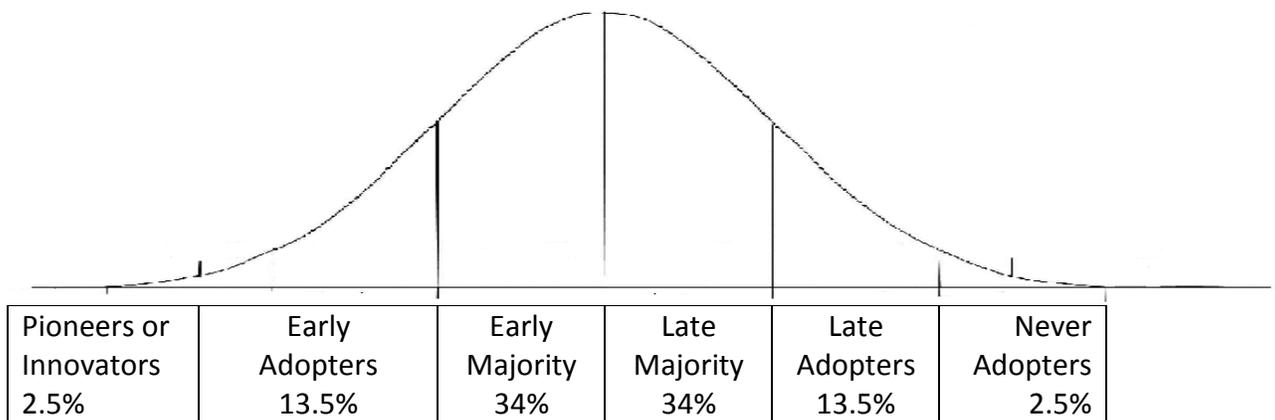
So the church is still here and you're going to be in it. The reality is if you're over 50, it's time to say the focus needs to be on reaching our children and grandchildren. If we don't, they will be lost, and that should bother us. If we don't, our church will be lost, and that should bother us. If we don't, the church in the United States will become incredibly weak, impact almost no one's lives, and over 90% of the people in our country will live their life without a meaningful relationship with God in the person of Jesus.

One of the best things to do is to return to our respective small groups and inform them, "I've decided that church is not about me. I'll be here; I'll give; I'll serve. But I'll pour my heart and time into developing a church where all our kids and grandkids feel welcome, where the church embraces them and changes their lives."

Rev. Nations is working with one church whose members indicated that in their geographic area, most people "are like us." Their children were raised and have left home, and they are now empty nesters. They claimed that there were few children in their community. However, Rev. Nations did demographics of that area and discovered that there is a huge group of families with young children – in fact, over half of that community is raising children. The catch? They are Hispanic.

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

What could prevent the church from growing and attracting new people? The fear of losing individuals to other churches is one of the largest reasons for not making changes which would enable growth. Unfortunately, not everyone will come on board and some will even leave the church. Diffusion of Innovation explains the acceptance of new ideas within congregations.



Adopter Category	Definition*
Pioneers or Innovators	Innovators are the first individuals to adopt an innovation. Innovators are willing to take risks, youngest in age, have the highest social class, have great financial liquidity, are very social and have closest contact to scientific sources and interaction with other innovators. Risk tolerance has them adopting technologies which may ultimately fail. Financial resources help absorb these failures.
Early Adopters	This is the second fastest category of individuals who adopt an innovation. These individuals have the highest degree of opinion leadership among the other adopter categories. Early adopters are typically younger in age, have a higher social status, have more financial lucidity, advanced education, and are more socially forward than late adopters. More discrete in adoption choices than innovators. Realize judicious choice of adoption will help them maintain central communication position.
Middle Adopters	<i>Early Majority:</i> Individuals in this category adopt an innovation after a varying degree of time. This time of adoption is significantly longer than the innovators and early adopters. Early Majority tend to be slower in the adoption process, have above average social status, contact with early adopters, and seldom hold positions of opinion leadership in a system.
	<i>Late Majority:</i> Individuals in this category will adopt an innovation after the average member of the society. These individuals approach an innovation with a high degree of skepticism and after the majority of society has adopted the innovation. Late Majority are typically skeptical about an innovation, have below average social status, very little financial lucidity, in contact with others in late majority and early majority, very little opinion leadership.
Late Adopters and Never Adopters	<i>Collectively Called Laggards:</i> Individuals in these categories are the last to adopt an innovation, if at all. Unlike some of the previous categories, individuals in this category show little to no opinion leadership. These individuals typically have an aversion to change-agents and tend to be advanced in age. Laggards typically tend to be focused on "traditions", likely to have lowest social status, lowest financial fluidity, be oldest of all other adopters, in contact with only family and close friends.

*“Opinion leaders” are defined as leaders who are influential in spreading either positive or negative information about an innovation.

The above definitions are taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations.

When new innovative ideas are considered, be sure to present details, and do not just include the dream. If you’re not inclined to deal with details, find one or two detail-persons who can ask you all the “annoying” questions so your idea can be properly developed and presented to the appropriate committee. Phrase things in terms of “let me tell you what I saw” or “let me tell you what I did,” instead of, “you ought to” or “you should have.”

Promote different ideas by putting DNA information on the website (as we currently do), including a “transformation” column in the newsletter, and celebrating every victory.

Think outside the box. VBS is usually run during one week, a Monday through Friday. Consider offering it one day a week during some or all of the summer. Instead of success being “we reached 50 kids,” success could be “we got 50 parents involved in one of the three classes [Financial Peace University, Divorce Recovery, etc.] that we offer every Tuesday evening while VBS is running.”

TWO-TRACK MINISTRY

TRACK 1: We do not radically change our current program. We will maintain that which is key, crucial, vital, and important for that first target group – folks like us.

TRACK 2: New members that we bring in are not simply thrown into an existing Sunday school class. Instead, create a small group system for them. Don’t throw them into a committee. Find ways to bring them in with a different understanding of how we do church. Change the rules for this second target group, not the first target group.

Over the past 50 years, the level of expectation of Methodist churches can be summarized as: don’t have a huge fight that takes a lot of district superintendent’s time; pay your apportionments; don’t ask for a new pastor; don’t close, because you’re a good church; show up if you like; give if you want; pray if the mood strikes you. As long as 10% to 20% of the congregation actually donates and serves on committees, we’ll make it. Both people and churches live up to their level of expectation. Many churches have evolved into organizations that are concerned primarily with finances, facilities, and forms. They have lost their primary reason for existing.

But the rules are changing. Now we should say, “If you’re here in church, you want to orient your life around Jesus in a way that helps everyone meet, know, and serve Jesus.” We will start to build the new culture, the new DNA of the church, with new expectations for new members, for leaders, and for ourselves. Generally, it takes seven years of intentional work to transform a church. The transformed church is the new norm, and it won’t snap back if a few leaders leave or if there is a new pastor.

DNA SUCCESS STORIES

One church has altered their Sunday morning services to include in each and every service a person or video that makes a short presentation that says “here’s something great that happened because you gave....” One other thing they do is send out a letter each year to their top givers that simply says, “Here is the budget; here’s what we’re doing; thank you very much for your giving.”

Another idea that has been used involves sending a thank-you card down every row on Sunday morning and having everybody in that row sign the card. Then deliver the card with home-baked cookies to every first-responder in your community, or to every teacher or administrative position in a particular school, or to everybody who works in an emergency room, or to an assisted living facility.

When asked for examples of area churches that have done well with their younger people ministry, Rev. Nations responded with:

- Edgewater UMC in Port Charlotte - Rev. Nations was pastor there, during which time he helped them through several difficult situations; they have since doubled their worship attendance numbers
- Suncoast Community Church in Sarasota - 1700 in worship, 250 kids each weekend, one Saturday night & three Sunday services, no traditional services, all four services are identical
- The Shore in Sarasota - a 15-month-old church, 200 in worship, one Sunday morning service
- North Naples UMC - new contemporary format started just a week ago; cutting-edge contemporary service anticipated in about three years when the new building is built; on-line campus launching in July 2013 to include both traditional and contemporary live-streams; partnership options for local churches enable them to use the whole service or just portions of the contemporary service (most likely the music portions); more full-featured; heavily integrated with social media; provides material for small groups
- Grace UMC in Cape Coral has been incredibly successful with Celebrate Recovery (the Christian version of 12-Steps).

Most churches that are growing with young people are non-denominational and do not offer a traditional service. It has been only denominational churches which had a pre-existing traditional service and are now trying to include a contemporary service to reach new people.

SMALL GROUPS

All leaders should be required to be in one since we believe small groups are essential to growth in the church. Rev. Nations is a fan of sermon-based small groups. In many cases, a pastor spends his largest chunk of time, up to or more than 20%, on sermon-related matters. Sadly, by Thursday, most people have forgotten what was preached on Sunday. How much life-change is being received if (a) they don't remember the sermon; (b) they never interact with the sermon during the week; and (c) they don't even receive time on Sunday morning to pause and think and reflect on the message they just heard. If preaching really is important and worth 20% of a pastor's salary, we should encourage people to contemplate on the sermon more in order to multiply its effectiveness. Small groups can use questions for reflection arising from the sermon; additional text or scripture will relate to the sermon; ask, what did the sermon mean to you; ask,

how do you apply the sermon's principle to your life. Most growing churches have a large small-group presence. A church that has 50% of its congregation in small groups is doing really well.

FUTURE DNA MEETINGS

DNA Coaching does have a newsletter to which we can subscribe. We can email Rev. Nations at don@dnacoaching.com and ask to be put on the distribution list. Future meetings can be in person, like this Vision Retreat; he can attend meetings over Skype; we can shift into a formal consultation process (much more in-depth information is gathered and analyzed). Website review and revision is also available. DNA Coaching has a web-digital-design team that also works with churches. Revamping the website might not be necessary for those over 60, but it is essential for reaching people younger than that.

Rev. Nations indicated he might send a secret shopper to church one week to see if we truly are helping everyone meet, know, and serve Jesus. If that person reports a negative experience, it will be conveyed to us. It was pointed out that "everyone" was chosen because that is the word used during communion – "everyone is welcome to partake...."

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm with communion and prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Hanson