



***Report for
Woodlake
United Methodist Church***



The Weekend Innovation Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the Woodlake 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 innovations of your ministry.

Strengths

1. We're a Roof-Digging Church!

A common theme we heard throughout our time with staff and leadership was around Woodlake being a Roof-Digging Church. This identity seeks to make the love of Jesus Christ accessible to all—even if it means digging a hole in a roof! (Mark 2:1-12) The Roof-Digging week was a catalyst for what it means to live out this identity more fully. We anticipate that you will seek to make Christ's love real and accessible in other areas of ministry at Woodlake.

2. Great People

Woodlake is full of great people—people who are kind and gracious. Multiple people described the church as loving, loyal, caring, and kind. In the Real Discipleship Survey, a “Life of Hospitality” is in a place of ongoing growth and maturity. Another leader named the joyful spirit that abides in the congregation, no matter what. The greatness of the people crosses generational lines as they seek to be in ministry together.

3. Genuine & Caring Staff

It is no secret that the staff is beloved. Over and over again, we heard about the devotion and care of the staff, one person sharing “they always remember what happened in my life and make a point to check-in later.” Key leadership notes that when the staff is “rowing together” there is energy and momentum in the various ministry efforts. In all things, the staff seeks to align all ministry to the vision of Woodlake.

4. Desire to Go Deeper in Faith

Throughout our conversations, we heard a deep desire to grow spiritually—both personally and as a congregation. This desire is reflected in the “Life Open to Jesus” portion in the Real Discipleship Survey as an area of exploration and experiencing a greater level of intimacy with God. This desire hopes that people of all ages would come to know Christ more intimately and discern God's call in their life.

5. Youth Ministry Rocks!

Many people throughout the weekend shared excitement about the incredible youth ministry here at Woodlake. The growth, vitality, and energy of the youth ministry is breathing contagious, new life into Woodlake. The adult youth leaders and staff are appreciated and beloved by the youth creating, an infectious atmosphere of excitement and a deep desire for discipleship.



Challenges

1. Financial Generosity

The church is in debt. The depth of the financial anxiety we heard spans across the generations in the church, with even the youth of the church expressing their concerns. The inability to respond to the debt is compounded by both the operating budget and income remaining flat. The generosity of the congregation is out of sync with the giving capacity of the congregation.

2. Focus

Woodlake is a church that is doing a lot of things. One person observed, “We seem to shift to the next shiny object before we have followed through on the last great idea or program.” Lack of clarity, accountability, and communication has led to competition for time, attendance, as well as incomplete or spotty communication. Newcomers are challenged knowing how to connect, when to connect, and where to connect.

3. Staff Overload

We love the staff! There is no lack of praise for the staff at Woodlake. The staff’s committed care for the work they do, and who they do it for, is evident. However, the current human resources are at capacity. They are “busy and stretched” attempting to respond to the plethora of ideas as well as opportunities to which they are accountable. The pastors and staff have not received even a cost of living allowance in the last three years.

4. Lack of Discipleship Path

While there are many small group opportunities, we heard a call for deeper work in this area. People asked for more and different small groups, especially affinity groups, geared to engage multiple generations. Newcomers and young adults requested groups that target their age or life stage. Others noted the need for a more defined, better-communicated plan describing the steps towards deepening discipleship. We noted some ongoing anxiety in the church around finances and facility space to support increased opportunities for small groups on campus— it seems there may never be enough of either!

5. Internal Systems and Processes

Woodlake grew very big, very fast. While growth is to be celebrated, numerical growth requires the adaptation and development of systems and processes that support the growth. Without this support, it results in the over-functioning of staff, leading to the frustration at the limits of their capacity.



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

1. Focus – Fully Live Into Being a Roof-Digging Church

Honor and sustain your unique calling without distraction. Throughout the weekend, focus came up as a theme in our conversations. The congregation, leadership, and staff desire a strong focus for Woodlake’s ministry. They felt that there are so many good ideas that compete for time and resources, but that there is no clear focus. Participants expressed a strong desire to galvanize the congregation around a single or “signature mission” that is unique to Woodlake and that naturally comes from who you are. Every interview participant talked about Roof-Digging Week as a shining example of what is possible when the congregation unites around a focal point. Second, a core mission focus will allow you to make important, and sometimes, challenging decisions about what you will or won’t do. This allows your staff and leadership to focus on what is most important. Lastly, focusing on your unique calling allows you to align your budget, staff, and programming for greater impact.

- A. Clearly articulate what it means to be a Roof-Digging Church by March 2020 (Identity)
- B. Identifying a signature mission focus for embodying a Roof-Digging Church (Focus)
- C. Use the clarity around Roof-Digging Church to evaluate program effectiveness in order to prune existing ministry and vet any new ministries (Prioritization/Emphasis)

2. Make The Woodlake Weekend Worship Experience A Model of Excellence

Worship is a core part of congregational life. We heard positive comments about worship during the NLI leadership retreat. We also heard helpful feedback from mystery worshippers that suggested attention needs to be given to strengthening all aspects of the worship experience. Likewise, over the course of the weekend, we heard comments about expanding worship leadership participation. Lastly, and more practically, the weekend worship experience currently has four weekend worship services that have four distinct styles and orders of worship. This significantly increases the complexity of the preparation and execution for the weekend. Given all of this and the number of other excellent options for worship in the community, it is important that Woodlake take a good look at the weekend worship experience and make changes so that you may more easily connect with those who you have such a strong desire to reach in the surrounding community.

- A. Create a team to redesign the weekend worship experience and bring a proposal to CLC to be fully implemented by August 2020.
 - 1. Evaluate worship styles and times in light of community needs
 - 2. Evaluate music and preaching content in light of community connection and needs
 - 3. Evaluate worship team, volunteer recruitment in light of community connection and needs



4. Evaluate hospitality for services
- B. Assess the four worship services and styles for staff and resources alignment
 - C. Create a volunteer recruitment and training process
 - D. Work with SPRC to establish a study leave (1-2 weeks annually) for the pastor in order to facilitate ongoing excellence in preaching as well as the renewal of the lead pastor

3. Discipleship Path

Woodlake has expressed itself through the concept of being a Roof-Digging Church, and that theme has permeated well throughout the congregation. The church has a desire to dig where they need to dig and to do what they need to do to get people in front of Jesus and his healing touch. It is a theme which has taken the church to the community.

Woodlake is now encouraged also to apply that theme internally. In other words, do the work, exercise creativity, and “dig through the roof” to get the congregation in front of Jesus and his transformational touch of healing. Accordingly, the congregation will develop a deliberate Discipleship Process that begins with pastors, staff, and Church Leaders which extends to all members of the congregation: seasoned members, newcomers, and any others who desire to dig deeper in faith. This concept has great potential and great challenge. On one hand, a consistent and deep desire from the congregation was heard to go to a deeper place. At the same time, there were strong voices that named the “shiny things” that exist in this active and wealthy corridor of Chesterfield County. There are many things that compete for the attention of our souls. The challenge of this innovation is clear.

We would also confirm the tendency to speak about faith but to default to the safety of generalities. Biblical review confirms that personal, congregational, and kingdom transformation occurs when individuals and congregations dig deeper, moving from generalities about the faith and from broad academic conversation to specifics and personal application and appropriation. It is clear that Woodlake is hungry to make this move to a deeper place and will, therefore, embrace the following steps to develop and lead through a deliberate congregational discipleship process.

- A. Establish a “Discipleship Process Design Team” (to include the lead pastor) by November 13, 2019, to design a discipleship process that will be implemented amongst all age groups and segments of the church. This process will begin no later than September of 2020. This process will include but not be limited to the following elements:
 1. Identify Discipleship Path that defines “discipleship,” offers steps of discipleship, and highlights resources within the congregation to facilitate the journey of discipleship for all ages.
 2. Define and craft a series of “What We Believe” statements (through use of a defined curriculum by the Pastor with the Church Leadership Council) to be displayed on the WUMC web site and be the topic of a sermon series. These statements will include a definition of discipleship.
 3. Create a staff covenant that inspires and invites all pastors and staff to be engaged in all the components of the discipleship process.



4. Create a document of member expectation that inspires and invites all members, but especially new members to participate in all the components of the discipleship process.
5. Organize Discipleship staff to align with the development of a discipleship process for the congregation through updated responsibilities and position descriptions.

4. Invest in a Healthy Staff Culture

As mentioned above, Woodlake has a very committed and competent staff. Due to the realities of the rapid growth of the church and its size, there is often more work to be done than hours to do it. The staff feel that tension and struggle with that tension because of their commitment and desire for excellence in their work. Due to the rapid growth, additional internal policies and procedures that will help guide staff have not yet been put into place. In order to support and care for staff and to ensure excellence in ministry, it is important that Woodlake give attention to the staff culture and environment.

A. Assess and develop policies and procedures to support a strong and healthy staff culture (Executive Director with assistance and approval from SPRC Committee)

1. Update all position descriptions and meet with each staff member individually to come to an agreement on the scope of work that will determine what is reasonable and expected in their area.
2. Develop and implement a performance management system which may include:
 - creation of annual ministry team goals;
 - establishing annual personal goals agreement with supervisor;
 - quarterly conversations between staff and their supervisor to report progress, modify agreement, discuss resources required to meet goals, and
 - annual ministry reports and evaluation for each staff member
3. Discuss and agree on the boundaries of staff decision-making, related to programs at Woodlake, and how decisions will be communicated with the Church Leadership Council and the congregation. (Executive Director and Church Leadership Council)

B. Evaluate compensation and future staffing to fully implement the vision and mission of Woodlake and ensure that the church is a fair and just employer

1. Evaluate the wages and salaries of all Woodlake employees. Salary comparison to other churches and to equivalents in the marketplace.
2. Create a strategic staffing plan for the coming two years with information from wage evaluation along with consideration of the ministry of the church. (NOTE: It was noted by multiple persons on the NLI weekend that special attention needs to be focused on the IT needs of the church. IT needs should be a near term goal.)

C. Create annual goals and strategies in each ministry area that enable the staff to see the interdependency of their work as well as the unique ministry that they offer in their area.



5. Generosity and Financial Health

The financial health of Woodlake was frequently identified as a factor that limits creativity, increases anxiety, and needs to be improved. When asked what kind of animal would best describe Woodlake, one participant offered, “A gazelle in leg irons” and explained that the church could run gracefully and nimbly, but was constrained by debt, limited revenues, and a lack of financial margin. A benchmark study of the top nine churches in the Virginia Annual Conference by size shows that while Woodlake is the fourth largest congregation by average worship attendance, it is ninth in terms of generosity. Two of the more generous congregations are located in Richmond and have almost half the worship attendance of Woodlake. Woodlake’s location in an affluent community in Chesterfield County means that the majority of the congregation enjoys a stable and generous income. The church has a real opportunity for improvement.

Financial generosity is a key Christian virtue that enables us to trust God with our resources. Financial stewardship is not a campaign, but a way of life. Generosity creates an incentive to demonstrate financial wisdom in our personal lives, helps people resist a culture of materialism, and participate in the Christ-honoring work of God’s Reign in the world. Churches that cultivate and expect generosity in the lives of their members attend to an essential element of the discipleship path that is identified throughout the scriptures. At the same time, church members are wise to expect thoughtful planning and the considered use of the resources they provide by the church. Communication of needs, plans, and dreams of the church, along with demonstrated transparency that offers information to the congregation, is a best practice for churches and other non-profits.

A. Create a master financial plan that will include:

1. Develop a report on current financial health to offer Woodlake members a candid understanding of the current financial health of the church including, but not limited to:
 - Ministry budget
 - Analysis of staff salaries and benefits compared to those of other professions in Chesterfield County
 - Debt analysis that shows historic information related to debt reduction
 - Future facility upgrades and equipment replacement with a timeline of anticipated financial needs
 - A report of financial generosity for Woodlake members
2. Design and implement a communication plan that will offer the congregation quarterly snapshots and an annual report of financial goals, progress on giving to the annual fund and debt reduction efforts, a narrative of ministry accomplishments, testimonies and other information that will motivate financial stewardship and financial transparency.
3. Develop and execute a strategy for planned giving (created by the Finance Committee and Executive Director) to eliminate the current debt, secure the operational budget and consider the establishment of an endowment to serve future needs. The goal of this effort is to resolve the historic financial struggle of the church and prepare it for ministry and facility opportunities in the coming years. The operational budget should properly compensate and provide benefits for staff, provide adequate pastoral support for the congregation, and fully support the connectional ministry of the United Methodist Church through full apportionment support. This strategy will consider whether another debt reduction campaign will be held. If such a campaign is undertaken, it would be an excellent opportunity for Woodlake to also fund a signature mission effort, ministry improvement, or facility refreshment in some area.



B. Cultivate Generosity and Financial Stewardship

1. Educate, engage, and improve the lives of the Woodlake and the broader community through ongoing offerings of seminars and classes in budgeting, saving, giving, estate planning, and provisions that need to be made in case of health crisis or death.
2. Plan and schedule ongoing celebrations and testimonies of the ways generosity at Woodlake makes disciples of Jesus Christ and transforms the world.

C. Consider how the current property, with its abundant acreage, might be used to serve the present and ongoing financial health of the congregation.

Next Steps

Woodlake 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:

- Sunday, September 29 following 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services
- Saturday, October 5 following the 5:30 p.m. service
- Sunday, October 6 following the 9:30 a.m. service

The congregation will vote on this report at an official church conference led by the district superintendent on Sunday, October 20 at 2:00 p.m. The congregation is invited to stay for lunch following the 11a.m. service.

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, September 23 in order 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: nli@woodlakeumc.org

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