

# Consultation Report Lexington UMC

## INTRODUCTION

We, the consultation team, would like to thank Pastor Rev. Raegan Seaton, the lay leadership and the congregation of Lexington United Methodist Church for the invitation to consult with your church as part of the Vibrant Church Initiative. The observations and prescriptions in this report are the result of this team studying the following information:

- Lexington UMC self-study documents provided by its leaders
- interviews with pastor, staff, and lay leadership
- a focus group with members of the congregation
- a focus group with the leadership of the church
- a meeting with the Administrative Council
- a MissionInsite demographic report of the area's population
- input from the Faith Perceptions "Mystery Guest Worshipper" report
- input from Saturday's workshop

It was a great joy to work with a congregation that openly cooperated with us and provided all the information we requested. The consultation team's prayer is that the congregation will use this assessment experience and consultation report to be more effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of its community and the world.

## STRENGTHS

### ***STRENGTH #1: VISIONARY LEADERSHIP***

Not many churches can point to a rich history of having a steadfast and faithful presence in a community. The roots of Lexington UMC date back to the early 1800s and the original building's historical plaque shows it was erected in 1928. The lay leaders had the vision to solidify its foundation for the future by moving in faith to construct the Family Life Center in 2017. The Family Life Center is the latest example of how Lexington UMC is a vital spiritual anchor for its members and the community. This visionary leadership will lead them well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***STRENGTH #2: PASTORAL LEADERSHIP***

The congregation of Lexington UMC is fortunate to have the dedicated and spiritual leadership of Rev. Raegan Seaton. During interviews with members, the consultation team heard repeated comments about the confidence placed in her such as: "*She is doing an amazing job*" "*Several people joined our church because they relate to her*" and "*My confidence in Raegan couldn't be higher.*"

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## ***STRENGTH #3: SUNDAY WORSHIP EXPERIENCE***

Worship attendance is growing in both the traditional and contemporary service and church members appreciate the close-knit community spirit, music and inspirational messages. The consultation team considers it a blessing that Lexington UMC has two different worship services that are both loved. The contemporary worship service is reported to be the only live contemporary worship service in Lexington, so it has a unique place in the community. One church member told the consultation team: *“Our contemporary service is on fire.”*

Twelve Mystery Guest Worshippers visited both services at Lexington UMC from Feb. 10, 2019 to July 21, 2019. Pastor Seaton received high marks across the board for being biblically-based, relatable, easy to understand, interesting and enjoyable. One of the many positive comments from Mystery Guest Worshippers about Pastor Seaton’s sermons was: *“The message made me feel at peace that Jesus loves me enough to die for me...I would definitely go back and hear her preach gospel again.”*

## ***STRENGTH #4: FACILITIES***

The consultation team has never seen church buildings so well cared for and saw none of the visible signs usually seen in aging buildings. The new Family Life Center features a large multi-purpose area, used for the Sunday contemporary worship service, as well as two classrooms, an inviting recreational space, and large, state-of-the-art kitchen. The overall campus appearance, including the landscaping, speaks to the love and pride members have in their church home. The recent updates to the children’s area and nursery are very inviting. Almost every space is used in a multi-faceted way to benefit the community and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## ***STRENGTH #5: HEART FOR SERVICE***

The consultation team heard Lexington UMC church leaders and members during interviews, focus groups and Saturday workshop voice their commitment to outreach efforts to the community. The dedication is proven through children’s programs such as M&Ms, youth programs such as 5<sup>th</sup> Quarter, and community outreach with Free-Will/Food Pantry lunch and Backpack Buddies, to name a few.

The members are proud that the church plants seeds into future generations to meet their spiritual needs. One of the members described the best thing about the church is: *“our willingness to serve the community.”* Another member said: *“This church does more community outreach than a lot of churches. If there is anything going on, this church is going to be a part of it.”*

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## CONCERNS

### **CONCERN #1: CLEAR MISSION AND VISION**

Lexington UMC has grown from a small family church to a pastoral-sized church. Opportunities and challenges come with that growth. One church member attributed recent challenges to “*growing pains*.” Another church member compared record-setting test pilot Chuck Yeager’s description of breaking the sound barrier to the challenges church members feel pushing toward the future. The consultation team sees realistic opportunities for Lexington UMC to become good-to-great through intentional efforts. As one member said: “*A few drops of oil here and there and we’ll be a well-oiled machine.*”

However, a lack of a clearly defined vision robs the congregation of unified direction and the ability to more effectively make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

### **CONCERN #2: FINANCIAL CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

As a church transitions from a small family church to a larger pastoral church, the financial reporting requirements grow more complex. While the church strives to be financially transparent, the current financial reporting does not create the necessary clarity to allow the church to move to the next level. Additionally, the team heard repeatedly that the number of fund raisers, even for budgeted ministries of the church, prevents them from giving all that they can to the operating budget “*because I know there is an envelope coming.*”

Several leaders commented: “*Our budget is growing and our ministries are growing to the point where we must know what we have and how it is being spent at any given time.*”

### **CONCERN #3: INTENTIONAL CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY**

Friendliness is different than hospitality. Hospitality reaches deeper and draws people into relationships. Despite efforts to greet and welcome newcomers, there is a need for intentional pre- and post-service hospitality and follow-up, and a need for an effective assimilation process.

Several Mystery Guest Worshippers mentioned a need for follow-up and hospitality for guests. One said: “*I did not feel welcomed upon first entering the door.*” Another said: “*My initial impression of the church was negative. I couldn’t find any parking, then I sat lonely and quietly waiting for someone to approach me or introduce themselves, but not a single adult did.*”

The church is missing opportunities for growth, as well as meeting the community’s spiritual needs, through intentional follow-up with guests.

Several Mystery Guest Worshippers noted there were no designated parking spaces for Sunday morning guests. “*Parking at this church is practically impossible.*”

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## **CONCERN #4: INTENTIONAL CONSISTENT, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

The consultation team heard from members that they want more information about church activities, meetings and issues. Communication around ministry events and decisions has not been consistent, often leading to misunderstanding. One member commented: *“I go to a particular worship service because I feel they get more information.”*

Mystery Guest Worshipers noted a problem finding their way around the campus due to a lack of interior and exterior signage. One Mystery Guest Worshiper commented *“the main frustrating thing is there wasn’t a sign marking the outside of the Family Life Center.”* Another commented: *“A sign should be visible from the parking lot to help guide visitors to the sanctuary”* and *“I did not see a (directional) sign for the restroom.”*

## **CONCERN #5: INTENTIONAL DEPTH OF LEADERSHIP**

Lexington UMC has many longstanding, faithful leaders but needs a system to identify and develop additional leaders in a consistent manner that leverages volunteers of all ages, gifts and graces and allows for smooth transition in key areas. There is a need for equipping new leaders, as well as further clarifying roles, responsibilities and accountability. One church member told the team: *“We need more leadership from ages 30-50.”* Another member said: *“Our current lay leaders need to be more forgiving, letting the younger group have more say and letting them do it their way. I hope VCI teaches us how to ask the younger people, rather than thinking they will just step up.”* Another member said: *“We have to pass our knowledge of our relationship with Christ to others through small groups and Bible studies. That’s where the growth – the real growth of what it means to be a disciple - can happen.”*

## **PRESCRIPTIONS**

In order to address the above concerns, Lexington UMC will do the following:

**Focus Mission:** On the day, this consultation report is accepted, to help build on its momentum, the congregation will take as its mission statement: *“Making 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 “making disciples of Jesus Christ.”

**A Day of Prayer and Celebration:** The congregation will have a service of prayer and celebration to embrace how God has worked and will continue to work through the congregation to bring people to Christ, in Lee County and the world. The service will allow the membership to be fully prepared for God’s vision for the future. The service will be led by a person to be selected by the Center for Congregational Excellence. The Day of Prayer and Celebration will take place on or before Sunday, November 3, 2019.

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## ***PRESCRIPTION #1: VISION AND STRUCTURE***

*“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18*

Vision is essential to being a faithful servant of God. The Coach, along with a specialist designated by the Center for Congregational Excellence, will conduct a Day of Visioning workshop. The purpose of this day is to dream of how God might work through the congregation both individually and collectively to reach the local mission field by clarifying congregational identity and purpose. This workshop will occur on or before Saturday, November 9, 2019. Pre-workshop homework will be completed two weeks prior.

Following the Day of Visioning, the Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will:

- Appoint a Vision Discernment team consisting of 5-7 people on or before Saturday, November 16, 2019 and
- Define a Vision, capturing the uniqueness of Lexington UMC. The Vision will be presented to the Administrative Council on or before Sunday, March 1, 2019.
- The Vision will be cast throughout the church and community, beginning on or before Sunday, April 12, 2019.

Upon receiving the Vision, the Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will create another team of 3-5 people to begin work on a ministry assessment of all current ministries on or before Sunday, May 31, 2019. The purpose of the assessment will be to ensure that the ministries are in alignment with the mission and vision of the church. If an individual ministry fails in this alignment, the responsible leaders have one year to realign it or sunset the ministry. In order to maintain optimal, long-term alignment, we recommend an annual ministry assessment.

## ***PRESCRIPTION #2: IMPLEMENT FINANCIAL CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY***

*“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” Psalm 24:1*

God has gifted us with monetary resources and we are expected to be good stewards. The Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will work with three representatives from the finance committee (including the chair) and with a person designated from the Center of Congregational Excellence to review and select a new piece of financial software for the church to use for financial reporting purposes. With the goal of having the new financial software installed by January 1, 2020. The consultant will help with the creation of a new chart of accounts, and the creation of new financial reports that will ensure transparency regarding the finances of the church.

Also, on or before December 31, 2019 the Finance Committee will create a financial policy for the church which will include the necessity of the Finance Committee approval for any fundraisers. This policy will be presented to the Administrative Council for approval on or before December 31, 2019.

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## ***PRESCRIPTION #3: STRENGTHEN INTENTIONAL HOSPITALITY***

*“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2*

Life is about relationships with God and others. The Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will develop a Hospitality Team of 5-7 people on or before December 31, 2019.

The team will be responsible for developing systems that focus on:

- Guest recognition
- Guest follow-up
- Ensuring new people form meaningful connections (assimilation)
- Tracking member attendance

The team will be responsible for effectively implementing the system on or before Sunday, April 5, 2020 and then evaluating the system six months later.

The team will schedule a consultation with Jan Floro with the company Grow Church Now (cost sharing between the Center for Congregational Excellence and Lexington UMC, with Lexington UMC's share not to exceed \$200).

Recommended resources are: *“Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church,”* by Nelson Searcy or *“Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships,”* by Bob Farr.

## ***PRESCRIPTION #4: STRENGTHEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS***

*“What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered proclaim upon the housetops.” Matthew 10:27*

When we communicate with one another, we help each other get on the same page. The Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will develop a Communications Team of 3-5 people on or before December 31, 2019.

The team will review all forms of communication, internal and external, and make recommendations for improvements for the sake of better connections with those outside the church and to enhance congregational unity and understanding among the members.

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The team also will:

- Schedule a communication workshop for the team and other church members with April Canik, a communication specialist from the Center for Congregational Excellence, on or before January 31, 2020, to determine best practices and formulate a plan for overall church communication that includes social media.
- Review the church website and explore improvement options.
- Analyze exterior and interior signage from a newcomer's perspective. The team recommends a minimum of two designated Sunday guest parking spaces in front of the sanctuary and two closest to the Family Life Center.

## ***PRESCRIPTION #5: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT***

*“Moses’ father-in-law said to him what you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out....”* Exodus 18:17, 18(a)

Through leadership, God enables us to do the work of the Gospel. The Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will work with the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee on or before February 29, 2020 to develop a process for the ongoing recruitment and training of lay leaders. The process includes:

- Identifying potential leaders of the church
- Partnering potential leaders with existing leaders in the church to clarify roles and support the transition of responsibilities
- Spiritual grounding as to the role of a leader in the Body of Christ.

The process will be presented to the Administrative Council prior to the Charge Conference 2020 so that the new leadership is reflected in the nominations.

**CELEBRATE SUCCESS:** Two months after the completion of their last prescription, Lexington UMC will hold a service of celebration and vision. This will allow the community to rejoice in their growth through the VCI process, reflect on their current ministry, and share excitement about their next steps.

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## CONCLUSION

We, the consultation team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation in this manner. Our prayers and hope for your congregation are that God will use this process to help you implement your mission more effectively, utilize your compelling vision through a developed plan, and thereby make an eternal difference in the Lexington UMC community for the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Seaborn Nesbett, Lead Consultant  
Rev. Mike Tyson, Coach and Director of VCI  
Rev. Roy James, Consultant  
Wendy Cederberg, Scribe

## TOWN HALL MEETING DATES:

Sunday, Sept. 15, 2019	Noon	Family Life Center
Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2019	7 pm	Family Life Center
Sunday, Sept. 22, 2019	9:30 am and noon	Family Life Center

## CHURCH CONFERENCE DATE:

Wednesday, October 9, 2019	7pm	Family Life Center
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