

Envisioning the Future of University Mennonite Church

July 16, 2017

Purpose:

To offer a forum to discuss immediate and long-term vision for the future of UMC.

Context:

University Mennonite Church (UMC), our conference (Allegheny) and our denomination (MC USA) have undergone and are undergoing significant change – much that has been painful, but all with an opportunity to envision a new identity and future to which God is calling us. Our pastor will be ending his ministry with us by the end of December. We need to give attention to where we have been, who we are, and where we might be heading. Our Community Café on May 7, and our Quaker style worship last Sunday have helped set the stage for our discussion today.

There is a growing movement within the churches of our country. This movement, not unlike the 16th century Anabaptist movement, is oriented around the scriptural principles of **incarnation** and **apprenticeship**. Most recently being popularized as a “slow church” movement (based on “slow food” values of intentionality, mutual dependence, and attentiveness to the local neighborhood), this model can spur us to rich visions of *the holistic, interconnected and abundant life* pursued in the kingdom of God. Living in new ways with our neighbors (incarnation) and learning what it means to be informed by the ways of Jesus (apprenticeship) are at its center.

Luke 10 is a foundational text – where Jesus sends out seventy-two “apprentices” who are to rely on the neighborhood (take no purse or bag or sandals) and simply offer a blessing (peace to this house). They eat what is set before them, offer healing, and say that this is what “God’s kingdom” looks like (blessing, healing, table fellowship). Simple. Powerful. Relational.

Direction:

Our Community Café generated feedback around camp Hebron retreats (we are not all of one mind), small group experiences, and some creative thinking about how to add a “house church” emphasis to our current ways of being. Today we want to have a conversation about our vision for the future of University Mennonite Church.

What do we value – in terms of **worship style, current ministries and affiliations, our theological leanings, what we seek in a long-term pastor**? What could an **incarnational, neighborhood impacting, slow church** look like in State College? So, some questions to begin our discussion today as we work to articulate our current and future identity and vision:

What do you appreciate most about UMC? What would you most be concerned not to lose? Where is UMC weak? What is the biggest threat to our congregation in the immediate future?

As we look at who we are and what we want to become under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, what would you like persons in our community to say if they were asked – what do you know about University Mennonite Church? How and for what do you want UMC to be known in our community?

What do you think of the increasing disinterest of our culture toward the church, even as there is growing interest in “spirituality”? How can we become more effective at Christian formation – deepening our faith and spiritual growth? Is our current model of worship providing what we need? Are children’s ministries adequate, or how could we re-shape them? Is 3rd Way Collective part of our identity that we want to grow?

What kind of pastor will be the best fit for us – male/female, age, level and source of education, straight/LGBTQ, white/POC, FT/PT, other?