

**Envisioning the Future of UMC:
Summary of a Discussion with Allegheny Conference Minister Dave Mischler
University Mennonite Church
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This is the most difficult work we do as a church, to look at our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and to try to envision our future as a church community. Allegheny Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Church USA, as well as UMC, are all going through changes, some painful. However, it is an opportunity to see things in a new way. Looking toward having a new pastor is another opportunity for change.

We want to look at where we've been, where we are, and where we want to go. The Community Cafés that we have had plus the recent example of a worship service incorporating aspects of a Quaker Meeting have helped to set a stage for working on these issues.

There is a movement within the national Anabaptist churches toward "slow church," which involves emphasizing incarnation and apprenticeship, more intentionality and mutual dependence, and emphasis on ministering to the local neighborhood. It is about living with neighbors in a way that is informed by Jesus. God's kingdom should look like table fellowship.

What do you appreciate most about UMC? What are our strengths? What do you want to keep?

- Host family for meals after church
- Peace focus
- Music, singing
- Hospitality, people opening their homes
- Honesty in sharing, supporting one another
- Shared responsibilities in worship
- Variety in speakers, use of lay preachers
- Priesthood of all believers
- Pastor is free to be involved in other ministries in community
- Kindness and attention to children
- Intergenerational relationships

What are the threats to our church community?

- Technology and social media take people away from face-to-face community
- Sports and other Sunday activities draw children and youth away
- People are sometimes more likely to experience God outside of the church building

What are our weaknesses as a church community?

- We lack a formal children's ministry
- Dying spirituality that contributes to spiritual dryness
- Not many young adults in church
- People in activist community know Ben, but not UMC
- There is a lack of balance between loving God and loving neighbor with not enough emphasis on God
- We lack emphasis on spiritual development and Christian formation
- We come across as too academic and intellectual

What theological leanings are important that we don't want to lose? What is the center at UMC?

- We are outward-focused and many are involved in outreach to the community
- Anabaptist nonresistance with emphasis on peace, justice, non-violence
- Open to the journey without rigid requirements of belief
- Theology is practical, demonstrated by how we live our lives
- We are a theological alternative to most churches in State College
- Our theology is diverse
- We are Christ-centered and Jesus-followers
- We send people out into the world, those who move away but carry the positive influence of UMC
- We are welcoming to LGBTQ+ people and people of other cultures

What do we want UMC to be known for?

- Ten Thousand Villages store
- Good singers
- Working with social service agencies like Food bank, Park Forest Preschool, Interfaith Human Services
- Working for peace and justice

What are some suggestions as UMC looks to the future?

- Mentoring program for younger children – kids need to see adults excited about Jesus
- We need to move beyond the church building, interact more in the community
- Children need to be more incorporated into the worship service, not just Children's Time
- Do something different on Sunday mornings
- Form a task force to work on changes, not a permanent committee
- We need to work for justice outside of 3rd Way Collective
- We could get involved in prison ministry, which would be especially good for young men
- We need to be more supportive to single people and people without children
- Start having Taize services again
- Try having a home church, a number of groups of 8-10 people in homes once a month or every other month, with one group meeting in the church for visitors
- Pare down the number of volunteer positions; there are too many
- Have Praying Sunday sometimes the way we have Music Sunday; have more praying in general
- Try to show people simplicity, buying local, eco-friendly, and other lifestyle expressions that reflect following Jesus
- Try to get away from ethic Mennonite emphasis
- Pray for and show love to young families
- We need to have 100-word stories to tell people why we are Mennonite and what we value about UMC
- Remember that we have had our ups and downs in attendance over our 50+ year history

(Prepared from the notes of Karen Rath, supplemented by the notes of Leah Witzig and Fran Osseo-Asare)