

Good to Great - Milford United Methodist Church
September 17th, 2008

Earlier this summer, as a crucial component of the Good to Great process, the congregation was asked to identify members who are perceived to be spiritual leaders within the church. Based on this data, a team of individuals was assembled, and invited to think critically about the direction of the Milford United Methodist Church.

We, the members of this team, have met together regularly throughout the summer for extended times of prayer, study, discussion, and discernment. Moreover, we have been guided by a wide variety of resources including conference officials, professional church consultants, and a large body of demographic research. In all, we have reached some important conclusions regarding the spiritual condition of our church -

- 1) **The Milford United Methodist Church is a good church.** Overall, the ministries of the church are functioning relatively smoothly, the congregation has a presence in the community, and we are seeing a handful of new faces in worship. By most measures, our church is stable and certainly seems capable of maintaining normal operation for the immediate future.
- 2) **The Milford United Methodist Church is not yet a Great Church.** Long term, our future does not look as promising – statistically speaking, MUMC will need to grow by 40% over the next 17-18 years *just to maintain its current levels of attendance*. Although our current condition is good, our trajectory of being just a good church will lead us toward inevitable seasons of plateaued growth and, ultimately, decline – unless we take the steps now to become a *Great* church, a church that is devoted to the lifelong process of making disciples of Jesus Christ.
- 3) **The Milford United Methodist Church lacks a consistent discipleship strategy.** Aside from school-age children, no other group has a clear educational track or intentional system in place to lead individuals through the progressive stages of the discipleship process. This is an especially acute problem today as we recognize that, for the vast majority of people in our culture, church attendance is no longer a normative childhood experience. That is, we are encountering more and more adults who have no knowledge at all of the Christian faith and likewise are spiritually underdeveloped.
- 4) **To become a Great Church, the Milford United Methodist Church must be intentional in carrying out its mission.** In order to impact our neighbors, families, and friends with the transformative love of Jesus Christ, we must strategically organize our ministry so that we can effectively help people “discover the joy of knowing and serving Jesus Christ” by leading people through the continually ongoing stages of spiritual growth – **a)** bringing the unchurched to initial faith in Christ; **b)** teaching new believers the basics of Scripture; **c)** assisting in the formation of healthy spiritual disciplines; **d)** identifying spiritual gifts and graces; **e)** equipping men and women for ministry with the tools and techniques of ministry; and **f)** encouraging everyone as we live out our calling.

In an effort to be uncompromisingly faithful to our calling and commission as the Church of Jesus Christ, we are implementing a strategy to become a Great Church. Firstly, in order to address deficiencies in our overall discipleship program, we will provide the training for church leadership to begin an **innovative cell group ministry** that will be designed to empower laity for real, hands-on ministry, and promote spiritual and numerical growth by specifically targeting our unchurched friends and neighbors. Cell groups are intimate, informal, lay-led, home-based meetings for worship, Bible study, accountability, and evangelism. In a cell ministry format, every cell participant is a potential cell leader, and the cell meeting provides the perfect setting for the discovery, development, and deployment of spiritual gifts and leadership abilities. We

anticipate the formal leadership training for this cell group ministry will begin in **October of this year.**

Secondly, we recognize the need to expand our **church-wide programming throughout the year.** This entails adding musical, educational, and fellowship opportunities, especially during the summer months when our attendance and involvement tend to decline sharply. We believe that ministry takes place 365 days a year and that the activities of the local church should reflect this reality. Beginning in **February 2009** we hope to put together programming options that will ensure that ministry is ongoing throughout the summer.

Thirdly, we hope to initiate a dialogue regarding our current **Sunday morning worship schedule.** Specifically, we feel that the 8.30 starting time for the Spirit Celebration contemporary worship service may be limiting our ability to target unchurched families in our community. Ideally, we hope to find a way for our contemporary worship service to begin at a later time that is more convenient for families with young children. We expect to reach a final decision about our worship schedule by the **summer of 2009.**

We are seeking input from the entire church regarding how best to move forward with these proposals. Thus, we will be holding large-scale informational sessions on

**Sunday, September 28th at 12.15pm, and
Sunday, October 5th at 9.45am.**

Additionally, we will offer a series of smaller **home-based meetings during the month of October.** During all of these sessions, we will be answering questions, addressing concerns, and seeking recommendations from the congregation regarding logistical questions such as possible service times, Sunday School classroom needs, staffing issues, etc.

We fully understand the profound risks associated with such bold moves. It takes incredible courage to make the leap from good to great – especially when ‘good’ seems sufficient enough for our church. But after much prayer and consideration, we believe God has called the Milford United Methodist Church *to be more than good* – God has entrusted us with the unique opportunity to become a Great Church so we can dramatically impact the kingdom of God for time and for eternity.

Thus, we ask that you will **join us by becoming active participants** in this process of discerning our church’s divine calling. In addition to attending the sessions listed above, please feel free to speak with any one of us privately over the coming weeks and months; we hope you will express your hopes and concerns, but that you will also prayerfully consider what is best for our church and what will help us best fulfill Jesus’ great commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28.19-20).

Respectfully submitted,

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