Faith community
United Methodist Church

October 3, 2011

Dear Faith Community Friends,

Earlier this year, we had the privilege of meeting with many of you at small group meetings. It is truly a blessing to serve as Faith Community's pastors and to "do life" with you. We really appreciate the honest feedback that you gave us, and we are writing to summarize the major themes that we heard during these meetings, and steps that we are taking as a result of your feedback. We've waited a few months so that you can see how your feedback has brought about changes.

FCUMC is a large group of people with different understandings of what church should be, and how faith gets lived out in our daily lives. Plus, we have different preferences in worship styles and ministry focuses. We believe that these differences are an important part of FCUMC's strength, and we recognize that we cannot act upon every piece of feedback. We are focusing on the major areas that we heard repeatedly.

Each year, the BSL (Board of Servant Leaders, our governing board) takes some form of a survey of the congregation. This year, they did so by providing the questions and discussion starters that we used in our meetings with small groups, and we have given them detailed feedback about the meetings. That feedback is summarized in this letter.

Why did you start attending FCUMC?

- *Someone brought you personally or recommended FCUMC*
- *You were church shopping and were attracted to the location, denominational affiliation, or building*

FCUMC's greatest strength is the way God works through you. When you invite your friends, you open the door for God to work in their lives through the ministries of this church. The current sermon series is all about building on this strength. Also, people relocate here and it is critical that we have a great website (revamped last year) and building.

What kept you here once you started attending?

- *Friendly church (feeling welcomed and being visited by the Bread Ministry team)*
- *Contemporary and Traditional worship services that are distinct in style but both invite us into God's presence*
- *Sermons that are relevant to our daily lives*
- *Excellent programming for children and youth*

We invest significantly into these areas and we believe that they continue to be some of the greatest reasons why visitors chose FCUMC as their home church.

In three years, what do you think should be happening at FCUMC?

- *Continued success in Missions and Small Groups*
- *Serving un-served populations (young adult and seniors)*
- *Continuing to grow personal spiritual maturity among members*
- *Have better small group leader training*
- *Building a broader sense of community as a whole church*
- *Have a visitation pastor*

Missions and Small Groups are two of our Strategic goals as set by the BSL. We are so proud of our staff and volunteer leaders who have helped us accomplish these goals, but more importantly, who have been used by God to change lives through these ministries. We are growing in our faith, we are holding each other accountable, we are giving to the poor, and we are sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ both here and around the world.

We are excited about FCUMC's new ministry, PrimeTimers, which offers outstanding programming and fellowship opportunities for Senior adults. After the 2010 survey, we were inspired to start this important ministry, and a

phenomenal group of volunteers lead it under Julie Smith's guidance. While we don't have a specific ministry for young adults, we do offer small groups for all ages. We are praying that God will rise up leaders for this important age group.

Small groups (including Sunday School classes) are the primary channels for spiritual growth. If you aren't in a group, we encourage you to email julie.smith@emailfcumc.net to get connected. If you are a group leader in need of help or training, feel free to contact Julie. Feel free to pass along suggestions for how we could better equip you. We heard countless stories about how God has used small groups to help people grow in their faith, and we continue to be amazed at the great work that God does in these groups.

Building community is an important challenge that we face as FCUMC grows. With four Sunday worship services, we cannot have the same type of community fellowship that we had when we were a smaller church. However, your feedback helped identify an important need to have more opportunities to gather together as a church. On August 14, we had an all-church picnic where we had a tent with chairs to help members of our congregation who might not be comfortable sitting in lawn chairs. On October 14, we will have an all-church potluck. We plan to have more events like this in the future.

Another concern we heard is the desire to hire a visitation pastor. The BSL is aware of the needs and desires regarding visitation overall and will consider the hire of a visitation pastor as they continue to evaluate our staff structure and responsibilities. Increasing the size of our staff increases the potential to build God's Kingdom, but it also increases our ongoing expenses, so we take it very seriously. We have made several immediate tweaks to the way we do visitation so that we can better address the need. We've increased the size of our visitation teams, and to the best of our knowledge, the teams have responded to every request for visitation. We have specific volunteers assigned to home-bound members. The pastors and other staff have increased the number of visits they do. Finally, the primary vehicle of care will always be the small groups and ministry areas, and countless FCUMC people are providing care for one another every week.

We need your help. Regardless of whether or not a staff position is added, we will always need a large volunteer team. Also, if you or someone you know is in need of a visit, please inform the church office. We cannot know every time a member of this large church family is in need. Finally, this task must always be shared by everyone at FCUMC because Jesus' call to love one another is for all of us, regardless of our staff configuration.

Talk about one thing that FCUMC does well.

- *Missions (local, national, and international)*
- *Small groups (growing smaller as we grow larger)*
- *2 worship venues (variety and quality of music)*
- *Strong staff*
- *Strong ministry programming (there's a place you can connect that is right for you, not just a Sunday church)*
- *Children and Student ministries*
- *Preaching that is relevant and biblical*
- *Friendliness of FCUMC people*
- *Communication (greatly improved in recent years)*

Praise God! We couldn't agree with you more wholeheartedly. The majority of our visits were spent listening to the ways that God has used these things to change lives, and we are so thankful for these strengths.

What frustrates you about FCUMC?

- *Church growth pains (lack of all-church events, pastoral visitation, knowing everyone, democracy)*
- *Staff turnover (instability, uncertainty)*
- *Need for more volunteers*
- *Need for more biblical depth (sermons, small group studies)*
- *No consistent follow-up on the Share & Tear*
- *CLC volume sometimes too loud and lights distracting*

It's a wonderful thing when a church grows because it means more lives are being changed, but it also means that the church itself changes. FCUMC at 750 in attendance with an additional campus of 170 functions much differently than it

did 15 years when we averaged 331. Today we have a huge variety of ministries and gifted staff, but we don't have the "feel" of a smaller church. We address this issue through small groups, and we will address it through having more potluck events where everyone is invited.

The church's structure has changed, which means that fewer people serve on committees (that discuss ministry and make decisions) and more serve in ministry areas (that do the hands-on work of ministry). Many mid-sized and large UM churches have adopted a structure like ours because it's a more efficient fit for the large amount of decisions that are made on a weekly basis.

Most of our staff are part time, which is great for FCUMC (more diverse skill set, lower cost than if we only hired full-time staff), but it does mean that we have more turnover. However, we fully agree that the turnover rate in the past few years has been too high (especially full-time staff), and we have made major changes in our staff structure, monthly reporting, and hiring policies that we believe will help the problem. We are currently reviewing disciplinary/termination procedures and our compensation structure to see how these can be improved as well.

Statistically, we have a higher rate of volunteer participation than most churches. However, we also do a lot of ministry and the vast majority of it is done by volunteers. Most of our staff spends significant time recruiting and equipping servant volunteers who do amazing work to build God's Kingdom. Like many churches, we rely heavily on a percentage of our volunteers who do very significant amounts of work. This is another area where we need your help. If you haven't volunteered to serve here, please check out our quarterly "Opportunities Guide" (always available under the "Get Information" tab on www.faithcommunityumc.org) and get involved in an area that is the right fit for you. If you have volunteered in the past and currently have space to step into something new, please prayerfully consider doing so. Finally, if you are volunteering at a high level, thank you, and please take care of yourself. We want you to be involved for a long time and we don't want you to get burned out.

Concerning biblical depth, we certainly want to help the congregation go deeper in our faith through understanding the Bible. We attempt to clearly teach the Bible in every sermon in a way that is relevant to everyday life. We have the privilege of preaching to all levels of spiritual maturity, from seeker to biblical scholar, every Sunday. Some sermons will connect more with one end of the spectrum than another. However, if you notice ways that our sermons can be more meaningful to you, please email us. Remember that our sermons should be a small part of your spiritual development.

Small groups and Sunday School classes are great ways to grow in your knowledge of the Bible. Different groups have different focuses, so if your group isn't going as deep as you want to go in the Bible, talk with your group leader and Julie Smith. Perhaps your group can go deeper (there are many great resources we can recommend), or you may need to find a different group.

Of the four strategic goals, which one seems most critical to you? (listed in order ranked by small group feedback)

1. *50% of the congregation serving in Missions/70% of the congregation in a Small Group*
2. *Church growth*
3. *Be a Multi-venue (worship style) and Multi-site (location) church*

BSL recently determined that the goal of multi-site growth should be interpreted as successfully completing the launch of Water's Edge (when it becomes its own church, separate from FCUMC), and that the Cox Road campus needs to experience significant growth before we consider another site. This is congruent with the feedback you gave us.

We have presented this information to the BSL for their review. We are blessed beyond measure to serve this amazing church, and we are so thankful to God for the opportunity to serve with you. Together God is using us all to change one life at a time through Christ!

Pastors David and Jon