



Report for  
Sterling  
United Methodist Church  
June 4, 2017 Presentation



The Next Level Weekend Innovations Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to Sterling United Methodist Church for participating in the NLI process so far. Your pastors, staff, leadership and your Next Level Innovations Team (NLI) are to be commended for their deep level of participation. It has been an honor to share in this time of prayer and discernment together as we explored how God has blessed your congregation and the next innovations of your ministry.

## Strengths

### 1. A Church that loves like family.

Sterling UMC is a church that feels like family. The newcomers on Friday night said they felt like they had been welcomed wholeheartedly into the church family. The Amigo service was especially praised as welcoming, and the mystery worshippers confirmed the church members' discernment.

### 2. Missions

Sterling loves to be in mission, and has a real heart for missions. In many churches, missions means a few things handed out to people, or a trip abroad that serves as a vacation; not at Sterling. This church understands what it means to serve people and to receive a deeper understanding of God as part of that service. The Real Discipleship Survey confirms what the WIT team heard - missions are a heart-felt expression of the discipleship at Sterling UMC.

### 3. Capable Leadership

Sterling's leadership demonstrates a high level of spiritual strength. Your leaders care about what God wants for this church, and the WIT team has great confidence in their ability to lead Sterling to the next level.

### 4. Committed Volunteers

The leadership constantly praised the volunteers who turned out, over and over again, to accomplish the many activities of the church. The DNA of this church shows a committed core of people who are willing to diligently serve God.

### 5. A History of Bold Changes

Sterling has a history of making bold changes. Several people remembered, for example, in 1983 when you were willing to leave the original church building in order to more clearly meet your mission of making new disciples in Sterling and welcoming new people into your family. Sterling UMC obviously cared about being in the heart of this community, above the ease and comfort of a small, insufficiently missional building. Sterling UMC can make bold changes when it is on a mission!



# Concerns

## 1. Too many missions, not enough focus

Many leaders and congregation members expressed frustration at the sheer number of mission opportunities that Sterling is attempting to pursue at any given time. Words like “burnout” and “lack of focus” were frequently mentioned. Even though this church has a heart for missions, it was noted in the statistical studies and comments WIT heard that there is declining engagement in the many activities that go on at Sterling UMC.

## 2. Hospitality

Mystery worshippers noted in several cases that hospitality was lacking from this church. Ironically, the family atmosphere is both a blessing and in some cases, a curse for hospitality. The church is very friendly with each other, but often less welcoming and aware of newcomers. The interviews, focus groups and retreat participants confirmed the mystery worshipper experience.

## 3. Empty Worship Services

Mystery Worshippers and congregation members all noticed the decline in attendance at all four worship services. For newcomers, it feels like a lack of energy. WIT heard about the decline in seeing children and youth in regular worship. While in general, worship was reported as good and the music was excellent, too few people in too large a space becomes a hospitality challenge. The energy and time of staff and volunteers could be better stewarded as well.

## 4. Alignment Issues

During interviews and at the retreat, WIT heard the word ‘burnout’ used quite frequently to describe staff, leaders and volunteers. Other mentions were of meetings that never met goals, too many projects with very little focus or vision behind them, duplication of efforts by multiple ministries and declining engagement by the congregation members.

## 5. Missed Connections

One of the most frequently mentioned issues was the issue of lost communications and missed connections. Without a clear vision behind it, communication has become hit-or-miss. Newcomers are sometimes being missed, volunteers aren’t sure where to show up, and leaders are confused as to their next steps. Also mentioned was an issue of failing to show gratitude for the hard work of the congregation, leaders and staff.



# Next Level Innovations

*To become a competent and compelling congregation in the twenty-first century is a very complex, messy, hard, culture-changing and long process. It requires a great deal of prayer, endurance, hard work, dedication, risk and tenacity.* Bob Farr and Kay Kotan

## 1. Sterling UMC Loves Sterling

***“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood: - John 1:14a MSG***

- a. Sterling UMC loves their neighbors; they have shown this strength time and time again. As Sterling UMC discerns its defining vision in the months to come, they will be guided by the core vision discerned from the congregation of *Sterling UMC Loves Sterling* for the next 18 months.
- b. There will be a Vision Alignment Team (VAT) of 6-8 people selected by the Pastor, Tom Lazo and the NLI Mentor, Rev. Mark Miller, who also will serve on the team. The VAT will implement and be accountable for producing:
  - i. By Summer 2017 – A spiritual discipline of prayer walking of the neighborhoods closest to the church. Prayer walking consists of prayerfully walking the entire surrounding neighborhoods, seeking God’s discernment for how Sterling UMC might be a better neighbor and love Sterling more effectively and fruitfully. *The United Methodist Discipline* reminds us that we are the expression of Jesus in the neighborhood, and while Sterling UMC may know Jesus well, this prayer walking will help with knowing the neighborhood and God’s desires for the neighborhood better. The District can offer further resources and training in this area.
  - ii. All ministries of the church will engage in *Sterling UMC Loves Sterling*, on an ongoing basis so that Sterling UMC partners with God in transforming its immediate neighborhood mission field. Several projects were determined, through your discussions with us, to align closely with this vision. These ministries should be considered priorities:
    1. Amigos Ministry –gathering and discipling those who speak Spanish as their first language, as well as their families and children who are bilingual.
    2. Grace Ministries – a simple, well-supported ministry that is part of teaching love within the community and missional discipleship. This has the benefit of being an intergenerational ministry.
    3. Kids Under Construction –VAT will seek to create pathways for families who are part of the preschool to participate more in the church. The team will develop two new invitational efforts or events to strengthen this connection by August 1, 2017.
    4. Rolling Ridge Elementary – By September 1, 2017, The VAT will identify two ways to deepen the relationship with the elementary school, where ministry has already begun, and invest more deeply in this community of children, teachers and other staff. Consider expanding in areas like mentoring, partnering with the social workers or resourcing teachers and administrative staff of the school. If there is a fruitful model of ministry developed here, it could be expanded to additional elementary schools in Sterling.



## 2. Hospitality for the Next Level

- a. By August 1, 2017 the pastor and discipleship team will develop a sermon series and short-term small groups for a church-wide focus on hospitality. Suggested book: Amy Oden's *God's Hospitality*, but the final selection is at the discretion of the Pastor and Mentor.
- b. The pastor, in consultation with the Mentor, will work with the Hospitality Team to develop a comprehensive plan for significantly improving the hospitality of Sterling United Methodist Church.
  - i. The Hospitality Team will research the hospitality practices of at least three other churches, review the NLI mystery worshipper reports and read *Beyond the First Visit* and *Get Their Name*. The hospitality plan will be put into place and begin by November 1, 2017.
- c. By December 1, 2017, the entire church will be invited to participate in a church-wide hospitality training event hosted by the Hospitality Team.
  - i. After the church-wide training, this Team will recruit, train and deploy greeters to all entrances of the church and to the parking lot to assist new guests and those who may need extra assistance. This is especially important in light of the upcoming 2017 Christmas season.
- d. By November 1, 2017, the Trustees will develop and implement a plan for adding user-friendly signage to assist newcomers as they seek to find the church turnoff from the road; move from the parking lot to the sanctuary; and navigate the building. Before final placement of the signs, the Trustees will invite three people who have never been in the church to give feedback before the final placement of the new signs.

## 3. Sunday Experience

- a. In order to improve the full Sunday experience of worship and discipleship, the pastor, in consultation with a new short-term Sunday Experience Team (SET) he will name, will develop a new worship and discipleship plan for Sunday mornings. First meeting will be by September 1, 2017. The implementation will begin in January of 2018.
- b. This team will implement a one-year trial of a new worship and discipleship experience for Sterling UMC that focuses the energy and resources of the church on the team's goal of creating an environment that facilitates an engaging experience and fosters discipleship while nurturing families. The proposed format (on a trial basis for one year, from January 2018-December 2018) includes:
  - i. 9am worship in the traditional style already in place of the current 9:30am worship. This service will include availability of nursery and Sunday School for all ages.
  - ii. 10am – Fellowship and Discipleship for all ages; including small groups and time for fellowship between the services, including Nursery and Sunday School as well.
  - iii. 11am worship in an intergenerational and cross cultural style, where children worship with their families and church community. The Sunday Morning Experience Team will explore with the Amigos Ministry opportunities for further integrated worship experiences.



## 4. Church Systems and Staff Alignment

- a. The SPRC will clarify staff alignment and the staff's primary job responsibilities in alignment with Sterling UMC's vision, with accountability for achieving vision-aligned goals for each staff member by December 31, 2018.
- b. The SPRC and pastor will arrange for the staff to be appropriately trained and equipped to carry out their ministries in alignment with the vision.

## 5. Communications

- a. By October 1, 2017, the District Communications Team will conduct a training for the staff and lay leadership of Sterling UMC to develop a full communications strategy that employs print, electronic and social media communications. This plan of communications will be implemented by December 1, 2017.
- b. Pastor, the SPRC and the mentor will be in discernment around a new position of Director of Connections to include
  - i. Implementing the communications plan
  - ii. Developing & implementating a plan for leadership training and recruitment
  - iii. Developing & implementing a plan for volunteer recruitment, training and appreciation.

### ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT:

Because of the high capabilities of this church, the WIT team recommends that in the next two years the Pastor and church explore, with the mentor and District Superintendent, shifting to a streamlined administrative structure. The District can provide resources and do an informational training on this process; explaining how a streamlined board operates, and aid in the process of moving from a traditional church structure to one that is more flexible, accountable, and aligned with vision. If the church desires to proceed with this investigation and training, the church will need to hold an additional simple majority vote by June of 2019 and request training and District Superintendent participation (which is necessary under the Discipline).



# Next Steps

Sterling United Methodist Church will hold at least two Town Hall meetings within the next 45 days to discuss this report and recommended the innovations. The dates for these town halls are as follows:

- Wednesday, June 14, 2017 at 7pm
- Sunday, July 9, 2017 at 10:30am

The congregation will vote on this at an official church conference led by the district superintendent on July 26, 2017 at 7pm.

If the Innovations are approved by a vote of at least 70% of members present and voting, the NLI process will continue and your mentor and District will assist your leadership in the implementation of these innovations.

The commitment to these next level innovations will be celebrated during a special worship service within two weeks of the church conference. The worship service will be a time of prayer and celebration. Participants will have the opportunity to come forward to be blessed and commissioned for this new chapter of ministry in the life of Sterling United Methodist Church.

If the report and innovations are rejected, the NLI process will be deemed complete for and your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded.

## Report Written by:

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