



*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that
you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Romans 12:2

Ardmore United Methodist Church Winston-Salem, North Carolina

The Western North Carolina Conference Discovery Experience Team would like to thank the Reverend Doctor Matt Farabow and the Reverend Joe Hout and the entire congregation of Ardmore United Methodist Church for your hospitality and for the privilege of partnering with you. Our prayer is that God will use this process to maximize the potential of your congregation as you seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We submit this report to you, which reflects several strengths that Ardmore UMC employs for successful ministry, some opportunities to improve the ministry of the church, and four recommendations that we believe God is calling Ardmore to fulfill for future, fruitful ministry.

Strengths

1. A friendly congregation with a heart for mission.

People described Ardmore as friendly and open to a variety of viewpoints, who seek to serve where they can. They have a special interest in addressing hunger as their parish has 20.3% of the population who live below the poverty line compared to the 11.4% in the state. Their food pantry called “Our Father’s Table,” is currently serving 100 families a week. Those families are offered a worship experience with music when they arrive. They transitioned to a drive-through distribution during the pandemic and offer prayer with each family. Ardmore has sent out building and medical mission teams, partnered with the Shalom Project at Green Street UMC, erected and regularly stock a Blessing Box, sponsored Scouting Troops, and has sought ways to help at the two nearby hospitals and the Ronald McDonald House. A person said, “when I came here, I felt loved and welcomed.”

2. Their highly visible location in the Ardmore neighborhood.

The church was built in 1924 on what was then called, “Mortgage Hill,” as many World War I veterans returned from the war and built homes there. Some of Ardmore UMC’s families were among those returning veterans but few live in the neighborhood now. This area has a population of 9,953 people from the 2020 census data. While it is still predominantly white (67%), there are Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Asian people living here as well. While there are 946 single and young families who are 25-34 in age living in the Ardmore neighborhood, the largest demographic of people living there are between 35-54 in age numbering 3,175. This neighborhood is described as one of the most desirable in Winston-Salem and is seen as “up and coming.”

3. An energetic, gifted staff, able to lead well before and during this pandemic.

There have been previous staff challenges and crises but Dr. Farabow, Rev. Hout, and Meredith Menius, are gifted leaders who have brought stability while also generating new energy and positive ministry outcomes. They are compatible and very capable, especially in the many ways they adapted to on-line worship and its demanding technology, to engaging the youth and children and their families, and keeping the congregation connected when they could not physically gather. Rev. Hout’s leadership in getting Stephen’s Ministries started and Melanie Menius’ work with the Unity Groups has added a new level of equipping the laity to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Growth Opportunities

1. Address the lingering issues resulting from past trauma and lack of trust of the staff which continue to inhibit decision making and acceptance of new ideas.

A consistent story we heard in our interviews centered on the fact that Ardmore has experienced several incidents of senior pastors and staff persons who made big mistakes and made bad decisions. Even though these occurred over a span of thirty years the resulting pain and hurt still impacts the ways staff are regarded and decisions are impeded today. The Contemporary Worship service continues to be a point of contention, more because of the ways it was started, than anything negative about it today. With the challenges facing all churches in today’s culture about declining worship attendance and the absence of families with children, today’s clergy, staff, and lay leaders must be able to respond appropriately to these challenges and not be overshadowed by unresolved conflict. This is such a concern for Ardmore UMC to address that our team thinks addressing this should be a priority.

2. Gaining clarity and alignment about the vision, mission, and core values of the church to lead to re-innovation and renewal.

In our Discovery Experience Saturday workshop, we led attendees in an exercise to see what time it is at Ardmore in its life cycle and who was in its driver’s seat: Vision, Relationships, Programs, or Management? Reports back from the discussion groups agreed the church is between 2:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. which represent unrealized and realized decline. Management was listed as being in the driver’s seat and as was presented in the video teaching the question management asks the question: “how can we keep the doors open?” Of course we all want to keep the doors of Ardmore UMC open, but as we learned the driving force of our work in ministry is the vision of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Some expressed concern that people do not know the vision of Ardmore even though they have written vision and mission statements. They have written defined Core Values of *G: God at the center. Jesus is Lord. R: Radical Hospitality. A: Authentic Discipleship. C: Compassion within and without the walls of the church. And E: Extravagant Generosity. These comprise the acronym of GRACE which is the heart of Wesleyan theology: grace in Jesus Christ.*

Part of the challenge may be to ask which Church Council Teams and Church Staff and Lay leaders are the champions of these Core Values? How are the ministries and missions of the church specifically fulfilling the church’s vision and mission? Whose lives are being transformed because of the church embodying its core values and fulfilling its vision and mission?

3. Developing relational evangelism as an essential part of your ministries. Have a defined process of discipleship to help people grow in their faith and service from the time they are a new Christian and throughout their lives. Reaching younger people and families with children.

People consistently shared their dismay that the church was missing people under 40 years of age and the small numbers of children and youth attending the church. To address this challenge Ardmore has hired excellent staff for children, youth, and adult discipleship. But these staff cannot bring in new people by themselves.

The demographics for Ardmore state that the populations of children and youth will remain the same or decline in your area. Even so, there are over 2,000 children and youth in your parish right now. The number of families and empty nesters numbers 3,175 so your potential to grow is significant. But your current Church Council team chart has no area designated for evangelism or “witness ministries,” as described in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. In the Book of Discipline (paragraph 252, 2016 edition), explains that, **“The witness ministries of the church shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; Lay Servant Ministries; and other means that give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ.”**

In today’s culture, basing church growth on “attracting” people to come to your campus is no longer effective. People are searching for genuine, caring relationships with other people. Most hurried families today do not need another event or program to add to their busy schedules. Today the key to church growth is for church members to seek to be **invitational and relational**. They need to be praying about people with whom they already relate, like their neighbors, their co-workers, their acquaintances, and friends to invite them to participate in church activities, small groups, and worship. Think about ways you can offer Christ-like love in your relationships with other people that would open possibilities to have faith conversations with them. Think about ways to better welcome newcomers and follow up with them after they visit in on-line and in-person worship. Continue to offer opportunities to engage new people off campus like the Pour Theology group and the youth group gatherings in off campus locations.

Consider expanding your Unity Groups to the Ardmore neighborhood and to the neighborhoods where the existing congregation lives. Use these groups not only for effective growth in Christian Discipleship, but also as, “welcoming beginning places,” to invite new people to join and engage with Ardmore members. These groups are already evangelism/witness opportunities. We encourage you to utilize these existing ministries as a way to share your Core Values of G.R.A.C.E.

People expressed a real desire to become a more diverse congregation. Seek help with equipping your people to know how to connect with the diverse groups of people in your Ardmore neighborhood and beyond. Evaluate your current process for helping new people learn the Christian faith and teachings as well as your process for equipping existing members to grow deeper in their faith and discipleship so that they can help mentor new Christians and their families.

What are ways the congregation can step forward into doing invitational, personal witnessing/evangelism to reach people for Jesus Christ?

4. Build on the church’s passion to be in mission to meet current identified needs by adding opportunities for advocacy and addressing justice issues. Facilitate ways to engage in having courageous conversations.

Ardmore people are rightfully proud of their ministry through Our Father’s Table food pantry and clothing closet and their financial and volunteer support of 15 local relief/care agencies. People appreciated the work of previous volunteers who went on building and medical teams and would like to see those opportunities offered again. There are some existing partnerships with the Shalom Project that Green Street UMC sponsors and there have been past efforts to offer help to the two hospitals and the Ronald McDonald House.

Building on these good foundations some expressed a desire to consider using the church’s influence and privilege to further partnerships with churches and agencies in the Winston-Salem area who are addressing systemic causes of hunger, homelessness, and poverty in their city. New Story UMC and Wesley Memorial UMC are doing ministries with at-risk populations of people. Could they be good resources for learning how to meet people’s needs more effectively?

In the current culture there are many divisive issues that can drive us into isolated, defensive, camps, or we Christians could be the leaders in seeking understanding among us. There was an expressed interest in Ardmore becoming a place of safety where people could come together and have discussions about divisive issues and learn from each other whether or not full agreement is achieved.

5. Maximizing the assets of your worship services, staff, facilities, and location.

The facilities are beautifully maintained and immaculately kept. However, people expressed concerns that they are dated and need refreshing and even some remodeling. Being located on a busy street gives great visibility but it is difficult to enter the campus off that busy street. The church owns seven houses that provide rental income but also require maintenance. There is a lack of clarity about what the long-term use of those houses and property should be for the best service to the church.

There is a noted disparity in the provision of technology in the two worship services which perpetuates some of the lingering animosity about the two services. Maximizing the availability and quality of technology for both services would enhance communication of the Gospel for the members and all those the church longs to reach.

Recommendations

1. Compassionately address lingering issues concerning trust of pastors, staff, and lay leadership and how those issues are continuing to impede the current growth and ministry of the church.

As stated in number one of the “Growth Opportunities,” this absence of trust because of several traumatic events in the past continues to inhibit the church today. This is not to be a process of shaming or blaming but a process that leads to healing and reconciliation. The church needs to prayerfully ask for God’s redeeming Holy Spirit to give them the ability to move forward.

Action Recommended: The pastor with the committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Task Force on Healing and Reconciliation to work with a trained Transformation Journey Guide to address these issues of trust, trauma, and emotional intelligence so that the church can move forward. They will present their recommendations to the Church Council for approval and implementation.

2. Gain clarity about your vision and mission and ways to align your staff, leadership, and ministries with them. Bring specificity to who God is calling Ardmore to be and to do in these times.

Ardmore's Vision Statement: *"Ardmore United Methodist Church, as a Christian community of faith, holds open its doors to all who seek the love of God. It is our purpose to provide spiritual nurture, fellowship, and growth to those who would follow God. As the body of Christ, we become the tools that manifest God's love. Using our minds, bodies, and souls, we will create an environment of Christian love and service to all which will become an example others will wish to follow. Our potential for improving our world is unlimited. God has empowered each of us to reach out to our church family, our neighborhood, and our total community with love for all."*

Ardmore's Mission Statement: *"Ardmore United Methodist Church seeks to be a church that connects to God, one another, and the world."*

Re-innovation is possible when a church puts its Vision back in the driver's seat by asking the question of Vision which is, "What is God calling our church to do and be at this time in our history? Our team sees Ardmore as a strong church with enormous resources in its staffing, lay leadership, financial wealth, and great potential for growth. These strengths can be built upon and developed through a strong understanding of the Vision to which the church is called. With Vision "in the driver's seat" we believe Ardmore can truly live into that unlimited potential for transforming the world.

Action Recommended: That the pastor, with the committee on Nominations and Leadership, will nominate a Task Force on Vision and Mission Alignment to address ways to discern what is God calling Ardmore to be and to do for such a time as this and to design ways to align the staff, leaders, and ministries to that Vision. This is more than writing or updating a vision and mission statement. This task force will name strategies and specific steps to fulfill the vision God has for Ardmore.

Using your current vision statement, consider moving beyond holding doors open for people who seek God to being people who go out and seek people who do not yet know God. Some questions to consider: What, specifically, will we do to manifest God's love? How will we intentionally reach out to our church family, neighborhoods, and total community? How will we improve our connections to God, to one another, and to the world? How will we communicate to our members and to our neighbors who we are and what we want to do in the name of Jesus Christ?

The task force will bring its recommendations to the Church Council for approval and implementation. The Church Council shall then be charged with keeping the Vision in the forefront of the congregation (Habakkuk 2:2) and maintaining adherence and commitment to God's Vision for Ardmore.

3. Train, equip, and empower laity to engage in relational evangelism/witness ministries to reach new people for Jesus Christ.

People want to see the church grow and continue to be a positive force for good in the community. But they cannot wait for people to come or expect that the pastors and staff can go find new people to join their church. Evangelism/witness for the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is every Christian's responsibility. Seeking to grow in our Christian faithfulness is a part of our calling. Being Christ-like in all our actions is part of our witness. Helping people to find Jesus is an act of caring. How can we learn how to do that in today's world? And are we seeking people just so we will survive as an institution or because we genuinely care about them and their relationship to God through Christ? Seek help with equipping your people to know how to connect with the diverse groups of people in your Ardmore neighborhood and beyond.

Action Recommended: The pastor with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Task Force on Relational Evangelism/Witness who will work with a trained Transformation Journey Guide to develop training and equipping for people to reach others for Jesus Christ. This group will seek training in Asset Based Community Development to better understand how to reach diverse people. This task force will also develop strategies for reaching the people who live the closest to the Ardmore campus as well as strategies for offering Christ in places beyond the campus. They will submit their proposals to the Church Council for approval and implementation.

4. Continue to grow your discipleship process for all ages to include new people and help your existing members grow deeper in their faith and more robust in their serving and giving. Couple this with a structured process for equipping and training lay leadership.

Through your current Unity Groups, and other avenues, develop a cradle-to-grave discipleship training process for all Christians from new members to long term members so that people are continually striving to grow to a more mature faith and serve in the name of Christ. Instill in laity the reality of God's calling on their lives and God's gifting them with the spiritual gifts to serve. A lay-led congregation is the result of people answering God's calling on their lives to serve and lead. People do not then volunteer to help the staff or the pastors, but they commit to serve out of their response to a sense of God's calling on their lives. It becomes their ministry as much as the ministry of the pastors and staff. Pastors and staff fulfill the equipping role with the laity described in Ephesians 4:11-14. **"The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to measure of the full stature of Christ."**

Develop training for church officers and other lay leaders. Create a culture of leadership development processes which make the transition of leadership to the next generation simple and expected. Consider equipping people to have courageous conversations among themselves and with

people who are different from them in their parish, workplaces, and neighborhoods beyond their parish. Provide leadership training and ministry accountability processes for church officers and other lay leaders to share the workload, develop new leaders, and leverage the abundant gifts and talents of the laity in service to Jesus Christ.

Action Recommended: The pastor with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership will nominate a Discipleship and Leadership Development Task Force. They will design a cradle-to-grave Discipleship Process and discern the kind of training, equipping, and empowering people need to better serve and lead in the church and in the community. They will present their recommendations to the Church Council for approval and implementation.

5. Maximizing the assets of your worship services, facilities, and location.

As noted in the Growth Opportunities, there is a lot to consider in evaluating the best uses of the church facilities, church playground, and its rental properties and the land on which they sit. The current facilities need attention for updating and the worship spaces need equitable technology equipment.

Action Recommended: The pastor, with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership, will nominate a Worship and Properties Task Force who will work with a trained Transformation Journey Guide, in cooperation with the Trustees, to develop a plan to address any needed facility updates, street access, worship needs, and best use of rental properties and land. Consider using the Wesley Community Development Corporation of the United Methodist Foundation in Huntersville, NC to give you an on-site evaluation of your properties and facilities. The Task Force's recommendations will be presented to the Church Council for approval and implementation.

Next Steps

- The congregation will hold at least **Two Town Hall Meetings** to discuss these recommendations.
- **Facilitators** for these Town Hall Meetings will be identified by the pastor in conjunction with the Discovery Team.
- The **members of the charge conference will vote on this report** at an official **called charge conference** led by the district superintendent.
- If approved by a **69.5% or more vote** of the official membership present, the Western North Carolina Conference Office of Church Development will designate trained Guides and partner with the church to implement these recommendations.
- If the recommendations do not pass, the Transformation Journey process will cease.

While the District Superintendents were given guidelines about what kind of churches to nominate to become Transformation Journey Churches, **the guideline about the pastor being expected to serve over the next 2-3 years while a Transformation Journey Church completes its process, does not bind the church to keeping its pastor, nor does it guarantee that the pastor will not have to move. The appointment decisions are made each year by the Bishop and the Cabinet of Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

- **Reverend Doctor Nancy B. Rankin**, retired UMC Elder with 35 years of service as the pastor of small to large churches, served as the Conference Church Development Director, and as a District Superintendent for two terms. She now serves as the Coordinator of Transformation Journey and is an ICF Certified Leadership Coach. She is the author of books on Church Assessment: *Checking Vital Signs* and *Choosing the Faithful Path*. She earned a B.A. in Christian Education, an M.Div. from Duke Divinity School, and a D.Min. from United Theological Seminary. Her doctoral dissertation was on "Reclaiming the Ministry of the Laity."
- **Reverend Kelly Crissman** is a second career UMC Elder. He worked in the furniture industry in Raleigh and Los Angeles while actively participating in the ministries of the local church as a lay person. After accepting his calling into ordained ministry, he returned to North Carolina and has served churches in Asheville, Hendersonville, and Caldwell County. He and his wife, Beth, served in ministry to churches through the ministry of Plowpoint where they developed curriculum and resources to strengthen the ministry of the local church throughout the connection. He pursued higher education at Elon College and a ministerial education at the United Methodist School of Theology at Claremont.
- **Reverend Doctor Bart Milleson** is a semi-retired UMC Elder; Doctor of Ministry: Wesley Theological Seminary; Dissertation on ways to nurture Christ-like friendship formation with other churches across denominations, ethnicity, and socio-economic class; author of "Crafting Eucharistic Friendship Across Cultures;" Founder of "Jesus' Friends Are Our Friends, Too." LLC; Coach, Consultant, Mentor.
- **Reverend Randy Blanchard** is a retired UMC Elder with 33 years of service in the North Carolina Conference. A graduate of Methodist College with a combined degree in Business Administration and Economics, he also attended Duke Divinity School, with graduate work in theology at the Universität Bonn. Alongside his pastoral work, he maintained a consultant service assisting churches and non-profits. As the Yadkin Valley District Vitality Associate, he assists churches in realigning their mission and ministry by discerning God's vision and implementing actionable goals to achieve that vision.
- **Reverend Doctor Sam Moore**, UMC Elder, Yadkin Valley District Superintendent
- **Rev. Dan Pezet**, UMC Elder, Director of Church Development, Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.