



Report for
Fairlington UMC
October 29, 2017 Presentation



The Next Level Weekend Innovations Team (WIT) would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to Fairlington United Methodist Church for participating in the NLI process so far. We commend your pastors, staff, leadership and congregation for their active and enthusiastic participation in this process. It has been an honor for WIT to share in this time of prayer and discernment with you as we explored how God has blessed your congregation and recognize God's calling to take your church to the next level.

Strengths

1. Reconciling and Welcoming

When asked what they love about their church, the people of Fairlington proudly lift up their Reconciling Statement and their intentional welcoming of all people. Significantly, during Friday night's newcomer focus group this was one of the most important reasons people came to visit Fairlington. The youth are also very proud to be part of a church with this ethic.

2. Social Justice and Missional Focus

Social Justice and Missional Focus have long been part of Fairlington's DNA. The formation of Wesley Housing, early participation in what would become A.L.I.V.E., the intentional inclusion of special needs preschool students, and the invitation and offer of space to Head Start are just some of the ways Fairlington has historically and intentionally engaged with the community at large.

3. Highly Visible Building

Fairlington sits at a crossroads; a church significantly placed and visible in the middle of its community. The proposed renovation project (already in progress) will position Fairlington to use this building in new and more welcoming ways to further the mission and ministries of the congregation as well as the neighbors and community.

4. Vision

This congregation's recent hard work defining a vision and setting a strategic plan is a substantial strength that should be applauded. Many churches develop but never implement a vision. Fairlington has a vision (Welcome, Nurture, Serve) and goals in place to accomplish that vision. The WIT seeks to come alongside that vision and strategic plan, not to change or replace it.

5. Clergy and Staff

During this weekend's retreat, and throughout our interviews, the WIT continually heard that Fairlington's clergy and staff are one of the church's great strengths. Retreat attendees frequently recommended them for being accessible and hospitable, praised the children and family programs, and applauded excellence in the music program and its director.



Concerns

1. Building Issues

It is clear that the issues that surround an aging building and infrastructure have reached critical mass. The building is inaccessible to those with physical challenges, making the desire for diversity and welcoming statements difficult to implement. The ongoing issues with the HVAC have left portions of the building overheated or undercooled. The entrance to the building and the narthex also inhibit the ability to be welcoming and hospitable. The lack of open spaces for gathering is also a need that has long been an issue. These were the most commonly mentioned building needs that specifically relate to and support the church's vision.

2. Worship

Fairlington has seen a decline in worship attendance of 18% over the last ten years, though in 2017 the decline has plateaued. Newcomers and others pointed out that though the church is reconciling and welcoming, they do not see the diversity expected or desired within the current worshipping congregation. Mystery worshipers pointed out that the actual hospitality of the church is often haphazard – while the clergy may welcome newcomers, the congregation and sometimes the ushers and greeters would neglect to welcome a guest.

3. Leadership Burnout and Lack of Focus

As we interviewed the leadership, we heard about issues of burnout. This church will need strong leadership as Fairlington takes on the renovation/building project and as it continues to implement its vision and goals. As the weekend team spoke with church leaders, we noted that most held 2-6 different positions, and anticipated more and more committee meetings and responsibilities. We also heard about a vast array of ministries that make it hard to understand the priorities of the congregation; where should the time, attention, and resources of the church be focused?

4. Communications and Technology

The newcomers, youth, and mystery worshipers indicated a desire for better communications and technology to help them connect better into the life of the church. Those at the retreat, as well as the leaders we interviewed, also saw the gap in these areas. While most find the printed materials helpful, the website, social media, and communications working across different ministry areas were cited as concerns.

5. Need for Deeper Connections to the Community

While the congregation has done a wonderful job on ministries and missions that serve the community, the congregation has not always been as intentional in forming relationships with Fairlington's neighbors. We were excited to hear about your new neighborhood outreach efforts, beginning with the recent cookout with the nearby apartments. We also heard from the newcomers that they would like to participate in and see groups in their own neighborhoods. They want to talk



about how to do Christian life together and develop deeper relationships. Weekend participants also named development and deepening of intergenerational relationships as a desire.

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

Building on Fairlington's Vision – The Weekend Innovations Team acknowledges the significant work already done to develop a new vision, strategic plan, and now a plan for building renovations. We seek to reconcile and link these Innovations to the work Fairlington is already doing.

1. Renovating the Building

- a. We affirm from our listening and discernment that the time is now to move forward with these improvements. We lift these areas up as the most significant building concerns that require focused and prioritized attention in the building/renovation plan:
 - i. A new inviting entrance to welcome visitors and fit with the Welcome portion of Fairlington's vision
 - ii. Large gathering and/or meeting areas for the congregation in order to maximize fellowship, service, and communication, in alignment with all areas of Fairlington's vision
 - iii. Repair or replacement of the HVAC systems, to prevent failures that leave people and ministries without heat or air conditioning.
- b. In order to come alongside the Building Plan, the Lead Pastor and Mentor will create, and the Church Council will ratify, a team of people who are generous givers and have gifts and skills around vision, gratitude and communications by March of 2018. This will be the "Vision Funding Team" (VFT). The team's goal is to move Fairlington toward a holistic culture of generosity and a trust in God's abundance in addition to supporting the building/renovation. If necessary and the Lead Pastor and Mentor agree, the Stewardship team can perform these responsibilities.
 - i. The VFT, with the help of the Mentor, will develop a plan of year-round stewardship that will align with the vision and grow new and existing ministries, by June 2018.
 - ii. The pastors, with the help of the Mentor, will develop a kick-off sermon series and small group study around these areas also by June of 2018.
 - iii. The plan should include coordinating a program to help support better understandings of faithful financial giving and assist people who want to better align their financial goals with their spiritual lives (Financial Peace University or similar style).



- iv. The VFT will also complete a plan for communicating and integrating the capital campaign for building/renovation into the life of the church with a clear spiritual understanding of a life of generosity. At the conclusion of its work, the VFT may fold into the work of the Stewardship Team if created separately initially.
- v. The VFT may also become part of and/or interface with the capital campaign for the building/renovation expected in the near future.

2. Diverse Worship

- a. A key piece of the strategic plan, coming from a vision of Welcome, is Diverse Worship. We would like to come alongside this part of Fairlington's strategic plan with the following Innovations:
 - i. In order to more fully realize diversity in worship, the Lead Pastor and Mentor, with Council advice, will create a Diverse Worship Team (DWT) of people committed to diverse worship practices by May of 2018. This team will:
 - 1. Visit and study congregations that have successfully developed diversity, seeking ideas for the needed changes that will attract the diverse people who already live in the local community. They will complete this study by September of 2018.
 - 2. The team will propose the needed changes to the Church Council for approval in October of 2018. These changes should align with Fairlington's vision.
- b. Presently, worship is meeting the needs of the current congregation; however, it is not conducive to welcoming and connecting new and diverse neighbors to the Fairlington community. The staff will create a Worship Planning Team (WPT), to include the pastors, music staff and two to three others who are creative, welcoming, and diverse in age. This group should meet at least quarterly, beginning with plans for the summer of 2018. The goals of this team are to:
 - i. Develop sermon series that are relevant to neighbors not currently being reached, based on the demographic information that the church is currently using from MissionInsite.
 - ii. Develop additional worship experiences that incorporate a variety of sensory expressions. This should include diversity in people, worship styles, and in offerings of liturgy, testimony, and music.
 - iii. Engage those who travel for work or sports, or have second homes, etc., by exploring the development of audio or visual live stream and/or recorded worship. This work can be done alongside the Trustees work in technology outlined in #4 below.
 - iv. We suggest using tools such as *Zoom/Skype* and *Google Docs* as well as worship planning technology such as *Planning Center* to facilitate laity involvement in the WPT.
- c. We applaud efforts that have already begun in these areas of diversity and worship, and can see that continued work in these areas will produce fruit.



3. *Focused Leadership Development*

- a. When a church has a clear focus around a vision, it is much easier for the staff, the leadership, and the congregation to do the work of making disciples for the transformation of the world with clarity and purpose. The gifts of the church community are best stewarded, and time and energy are not wasted, when there is clarity of vision. There is less burnout of leaders and more joy in the ministry. The completion of Fairlington's vision has allowed for a framework for this next step in life of the church.
- b. By March 2018, the Lead Pastor and NLI Mentor will nominate up to 8 people for a temporary Focus Team (FT) for the NLI season of Innovations, to be ratified by the Church Council. This team will be responsible for developing and implementing a focus of the church's resources, ministries, and leadership around the existing vision. Questions they might consider include: *How can we best move toward our vision? What is the most important item to focus on next for the church? What are the priorities for the resources available?* This team should meet at least quarterly to check in on the process of focusing and leadership development.
- c. As part of the work of focusing, the FT should read books together to help in developing a common language and practice. The NLI team suggests:
 - i. *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown—so that the Team has a common language and understanding of how research and priority setting can help accomplish the vision.
 - ii. *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolinger—so that the Team can understand better the adaptive challenges facing the church community.
- d. By June 2018, the FT will coordinate with the existing Nominations Committee in the development and deployment of a leadership recruiting and training system to reduce burnout, and incorporate and empower new leadership into the life of the church. The two teams should consider strategies such as clarity around goals for teams, accountable deadlines, and diversity in recruitment and development.
- e. As part of an effort to focus, the Staff Parish Relations Committee will create a task force of human resource professionals (SPRC Task Force) by January 2019, to review current staffing and to assess staff focus on the vision. This task force will also review all staff job descriptions and positions.
 - i. We suggest the SPRC Task Force read Susan Beaumont's book *When Moses Meets Aaron* so that a common language and understanding of staff focusing is available. The District can help resource this project as needed.
 - ii. Tasks the staff are currently doing that can be done by laity shall be identified and a plan will be developed to recruit laity to perform these tasks, freeing up the staff to focus on the vision and offer their substantial gifts more fully into the life of the church.
 - iii. The SPRC Task Force should complete their work by September 2019.

4. **Communications & Technology**



- a. Newcomers and youth in particular pointed out new technology and communication methods that could help Fairlington's missions and ministries work more efficiently and communicate more effectively.
- b. Fairlington needs to update technology throughout its ministries and building. The WIT suggests the following as critical technological enhancements to be considered and accomplished as the church is able from January 2018 – December 2018:
 - i. Upgrade the sound system in the sanctuary – this should be a key priority. This would be the work of the Trustees, and if this becomes part of the Building Plan, they should consider temporary fixes until the Building Plan is implemented. It is vital that the congregation and guests be able to clearly hear the worship service.
 - ii. Update and maintain the website with an emphasis on new visitors, ensuring a responsive, mobile-friendly design. We understand this has begun, but should also be a key priority. We suggest that the website be tested by three people who have never visited it, for clarity and ease of use including on mobile phones. Approximately 80% of new guests will first view the website on their phones.
 - iii. Consider technology enhancements for worship and recording of worship; this would also be a part of the work of the Trustees.
 - iv. Incorporate technology throughout the building to enhance education and ministries. This could be a part of the Building Plan.
- c. By June 2018, the Trustees will develop and implement a plan to evaluate and add user-friendly signage to assist newcomers as they 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 before to give feedback on the placement of the new signs. Consider adding maps and color coding walls and hallway wings, as suggested by the focus groups this weekend.
- d. The Lead Pastor or her designee will create a 2-3 person Communications Team (CT) of people with technology and communications gifts. The goal of CT is to develop a communication plan to address, improve, and effectively use all areas of communication including digital, social media, print, etc. The team should begin their work by May of 2018. The District can offer assistance in developing an overall communications plan. The work of the website design should be incorporated into this plan and accountability.

5. Outreach

- a. Fairlington is blessed with many neighbors that are younger and more diverse than the current worshiping congregation. Reaching these new neighbors will require new strategies.
- b. The Outreach Task Force (which already exists) will develop a comprehensive plan of action for connecting the church and the local community along the following strategies and ideas by July of 2018:
 - i. Neighborhood Small Groups
 - 1. We suggest the task force read together *Connect* by Phil Maynard or the *Art of Neighboring* by David Runyon and Jay Pathak so that they have a common language and understand the latest work being done in the areas of neighborhood small groups.



2. By October 2018 the Outreach Task Force should lead congregational prayer walk around local neighborhoods to observe and discover more about the neighbors. Training on prayer walking is available from the District.
 3. The Outreach Task Force will recruit and train small group facilitators for a launch of two new neighborhood based small groups with 2-3 church attenders. These experimental groups can choose the neighborhood location, the type of curriculum desired, and should agree to invite 2-3 people from the neighborhood to join this Christian or interfaith fellowship—intentionally practicing “doing life together.” The goal for this pilot program should be January 2019.
- c. Mystery worshippers helped the congregation see that while they are friendly, they are not always intentionally welcoming. To help the congregation understand the theological issues, the Worship Planning Team (from 2(b) above) will develop a sermon series around the theology of hospitality, with a suggested resource of *God’s Hospitality* by Amy Oden. This should be accomplished by November 2018.
 - d. The Welcome Team (which already exists) will develop a comprehensive plan for significantly improving the hospitality of Fairlington by October of 2018, so that hospitality is firmly in place for the Christmas season of 2018.
 - i. The 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* by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan.
 - e. By November 2018 the entire church will be invited to participate in a church-wide hospitality training event hosted by the Welcome Team. The District can provide this training if needed.
 - i. After the church-wide training, the Welcome 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 as a pilot program in Advent/December of 2018. If the Welcome Team feels this process is successful in welcoming guests and providing better hospitality, it should be continued.



Next Steps

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

- Sunday, November 5 after 11:00 a.m. worship
- Sunday, November 19 after 11:00 a.m. worship

The church will vote on the Innovations at an official church conference led by the District Superintendent on **Tuesday November 28, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.**

The vote will be taken on the Innovations as a whole, and not individually. If Fairlington approves the Innovations 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 should be celebrated during a special worship service. The worship service will be a time of prayer and celebration. Participants will have the opportunity to come forward for a time of blessing and commissioning for this new chapter of ministry in the life of Fairlington United Methodist Church.

If Fairlington rejects the report and Innovations by way of votes, the NLI process will be deemed complete at Fairlington, your mentor's ministry with your congregation will be concluded, and prioritization of Fairlington for training and resources at the District level will end as resources are committed to other NLI churches.

Report Written by:

Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, Bi-District Coordinator for Church Revitalization and Leadership Development

Rev. Dr. Brian Brown, Pastor at Woodlawn/Faith Fairlington's NLI Mentor

Rev. Jeff Mickle, District Superintendent of Alexandria

Kim Johnson, Bi-District Communications Coordinator

Rev. Amy Grant, Associate Pastor, Fairfax UMC

Rev. Melissa Dunlap, Arlington Coordinator for Church Development

