

# Consultation Report for Wildwood UMC

## INTRODUCTION

We, the consultation team, would like to thank Pastor Rhett Ansley, the lay leadership and the congregation of Wildwood UMC for the invitation to consult with your church as part of the Vibrant Church Initiative. The observations and prescriptions in this report are the result of this team studying the following information:

- Wildwood UMC self-study document provided by its leaders
- interviews with pastor, staff and lay leadership
- a focus group with members of the congregation
- a meeting with the church council
- a MissionInsite demographic report of the area's population
- input from the Faith Perceptions "Mystery Guest Worshipper" report
- input from Saturday's leadership workshop

It was a great joy to work with a congregation that openly cooperated with us and provided all the information we requested. The consult team's prayer is that God will use this assessment experience and consultation report so that Wildwood UMC will more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of its community and the world.

## STRENGTHS

### *STRENGTH #1: A PASSION FOR SERVING THE COMMUNITY*

This congregation has a strong history of community service. The consultation team repeatedly heard of various ministries, including pastoral care in community emergencies, and providing shelter for people displaced by floods, hurricanes and fires. Beyond the Walls service opportunities in the community, an active food bank, and other ministries demonstrate this commitment to community. When crises arise, the congregation, staff and leaders respond and make themselves available for service. The church is known in the community to offer service whenever there is a need to be addressed. It is apparent that the congregation has a heart for service. One member said, "when there is a need, people help immediately."

Some of the mystery guests learned of the church's reputation as they inquired about the church at local businesses. "I spoke to a lady who said her son and daughter-in-law attend the church and that they love it. They made it their church home and felt welcomed the first time they visited the church and that's why they joined. She also said the church gives back to the community."

Church members understand that the church exists to "love the unlovable" and are willing to serve in sacrificial ways to achieve this. "We can be a beacon in this community for many things," a member told the team.

It is often asked by church consultants, "Would anyone notice if your church went away?" In the case of Wildwood UMC, there would be a big hole in the community. Wildwood UMC transforms the

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community by its loving grace, and in tandem with the Holy Spirit, people come to faith in Jesus Christ and lives are remade because of the pastors, staff and congregation of the church.

## *STRENGTH #2: STRATEGIC LOCATION AND FACILITY*

Wildwood UMC has a unique opportunity to grow. It is located in a thriving community along a major thoroughfare with a steady flow of traffic. The church facility is a strong asset for the congregation and the community.

According to the MissionInsite demographic study, there are more than 12,000 people within a three-mile radius of the church. The study found that the community has fairly strong religious program and ministry preferences. About 17% of those surveyed said that religious/spiritual programs are very important, while 36% say they are modestly important. Spiritual discussion groups were very important to 11% and modestly important to 43%. Twenty-two percent said traditional worship experiences are very important and 42% said these are modestly important. Contemporary worship experiences were very important to 10% while 42% felt they were modestly important.

The entire church campus at Wildwood UMC is well thought out and beautifully maintained. The building exterior, complemented by modern landscaping, presents an excellent first impression. The interior spaces, including the narthex, sanctuary, classrooms, youth areas and multipurpose spaces are creatively designed. The Wildwood Christian Academy presents a welcoming, safe and imaginatively decorated learning environment. "Our building is so beautiful, people stop by just to see the inside," a member noted. An added strength is the adjacent 4.5-acre road frontage property along FM 1488 that has potential for future development.

## *STRENGTH #3: SMALL GROUPS*

Small groups on Sundays and every other day of the week are an important part of the connections made within the church. The church's website lists 16 opportunities for small group participation. Numerous members and leaders told the team that the small groups have brought them more closely into the life of the church. Small groups allow people to build community and intimacy that extend beyond the confines of the church house. Many people shared how this church embraced them in difficult moments and helped them to find their way forward.

## *STRENGTH #4: THRIVING YOUTH MINISTRIES AND PRESCHOOL*

Programs for youth are thriving, with regular attendance of 70 young people reported at Wednesday night worship and social activities. Intentional space for youth programs is well designed to "allow students to interact with God in a fresh new way." The Christian Academy, with 30 teachers, serves 176 children. We learned that the staff size has doubled in the last eight years, a significant sign of growth. The team also heard that the Academy has attracted new families to attend and join the church. This is an excellent bridge to church growth.

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## *STRENGTH #5: MUSIC PROGRAM*

Mystery worshipers who visited Wildwood UMC gave very high ratings to its entire music ministry. These ratings are supported by the church's long tradition of investment in its music department. Guests noted high quality, professionalism and variety of music at both services. The church has the foresight to hire young music interns for the music program, which is a wise investment in the Kingdom of God. With about 40 members, the choir size is a sign of strength.

## CONCERNS

### *CONCERN #1: LACK OF CLEAR VISION AND GROWTH STRATEGY*

"We need to become fishers of men and not keepers of the aquarium," one member commented.

Without an inspiring and prayerful vision that forges a shared intentionality, staff and ministries tend to be unfocused, which dulls the overall impact of the church. While many members could cite the church's stated vision, it was not clear how the vision relates to the work of the church in all areas. Wildwood UMC has an urgent need to discern where God is taking them next. The team heard repeatedly that members, committees and staff are "just spinning." The concern was also raised that no one is taking the lead to make decisions, and that decision-making often bogs down due to lack of direction.

Without a clear vision and mission, the church's long term growth strategies will remain murky at best. Without long term growth strategies, living into the vision and mission will be impossible.

### *CONCERN #2: THE SUNDAY EXPERIENCE IS NOT REACHING ITS POTENTIAL*

In worship we are drawn closer to God and called into a deeper relationship. God is the focus of our worship and the audience of our worship. This shared experience is a critical component in the spiritual life of the Church. There are several concerns regarding the entire Sunday morning experience at Wildwood UMC.

The timing between services and small groups was identified by many members as a source of stress. This stress is not conducive to the Sunday morning serenity.

The pastor and the staff currently plan worship, and the team heard a need for more timely planning and execution in the crafting of worship services. The integration of all Sunday morning components is needed.

It is a concern that some of the guests who worshiped on Sunday at the 11:00 service did not experience the excellent hospitality the church is otherwise known for. Mystery guests reported inconsistent worship experiences. There is a lack of a consistent flow of worship and community between both services. "The sanctuary looks sparsely occupied at the start of the 11:00 service, and then it fills up as people enter late," a leader noted.

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## *CONCERN #3: STAFF, LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE*

In the absence of a clear mission and vision, the staff is structured to maintain the current needs rather than to accomplish a clarified vision. The current staff structure does not allow for effective decision-making, conflict resolution and follow-through. It is encouraging to see the strength of the current staff in place, but without regular staff development and training, the church will not be positioned for future growth, and will be unable to build upon existing momentum.

## *CONCERN #4: HUNGER FOR SPIRITUAL DEPTH*

While Wildwood UMC's ministries include many opportunities for spiritual growth, we heard of a hunger for a deeper walk with Jesus Christ. We heard a strong desire for greater spiritual depth from the pulpit, worship and programming. Members seek to be challenged in their faith walk. "We need to look at difficult topics through a Jesus lens in light of the insane world we live in," one member stated. We also heard a member comment that "there are no conversations on the spiritual issues and we're struggling to lead people in that deep personal faith."

## PRESCRIPTIONS

In order to address the above concerns, Wildwood UMC will do the following:

**Focus Mission:** On the day this consultation report is accepted, to help build on its momentum, the congregation will take as its mission statement: "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." This means that every ministry in the congregation must demonstrate how it will accomplish the mission and that new ministries need to have as their primary purpose "making disciples of Jesus Christ."

**A Day of Prayer and Celebration:** The congregation will have a service of prayer and celebration to thank God for all of the work that has been done and the bright future ahead for Wildwood UMC. The service will allow the membership to be fully prepared for God's vision for the future. The service will be led by a person to be selected by the Center for Congregational Excellence. The Day of Prayer and Celebration will take place on or before November 17, 2019.

## *PRESCRIPTION #1: VISION AND STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN*

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* Proverbs 29:18

Wildwood UMC will thrive in fresh ways with alignment to unify purpose and ignite leadership, giving, involvement and spiritual growth.

Wildwood UMC and the Texas Annual Conference are aware that this church's mission field is in a high growth pattern. There is a need to discern God's dream for Wildwood UMC and strategize about whether it will become a much larger church or reach out to the larger community in a different way. The question is: will Wildwood UMC expand its footprint at 8911 FM 1488, will it replicate itself in a second location, remain as it is, or discover a yet-unnamed way to live into the Great Commission?

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**Vision Clarification:** A designated facilitator will conduct a Day of Visioning workshop with Wildwood UMC members. The purpose of this day is to dream of how God might work through this congregation, individually and collectively to reach the local mission field. This day will occur on or before January 17, 2020. Pre-workshop homework will be completed two weeks prior.

Following the Day of Visioning, the pastors, in consultation with the coach, will: 1) appoint a Visioning Team consisting of 6-8 people on or before January 31, 2020; 2) refine a Vision Statement, capturing the uniqueness of Wildwood UMC, to be approved by the church council on or before April 30, 2020.

Upon approval of the Vision Statement, the pastors, in consultation with the coach, will assemble a different 5-7 person task force to begin work on a ministry audit of all current ministries by May 1, 2020. The purpose of the audit will be to ensure the ministries are in alignment with the mission and vision of the church. This process will be completed by July 30, 2020. If a specific ministry does not align with or complement the vision, team leaders must revise or sunset the ministry within a year of the audit. In order to maintain optimal alignment long-term, the church will conduct a ministry audit once every two years.

**Strategic Growth Plan:** The Pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will name a Strategic Growth Planning Team comprised of 5-7 members by January 17, 2020. This team will assess the growth patterns, community needs and the current Wildwood UMC culture and will work to understand how to find the way forward. The team will bring a recommendation to the church council by April 30, 2020. The church may request resources from the Center for Congregational Excellence to guide this process.

Depending on the Strategic Growth Planning Team's recommendation, it will then develop a strategic plan for the next five years by December 31, 2020. The plan will contain benchmarks and goals as appropriate.

## *PREScription #2: IMPROVE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE*

*"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10*

Sunday morning is the primary connection of people and the gospel. A Sunday Morning Experience Team of 5-7 members will be named by the pastor in consultation with the coach by November 14, 2019. In order to provide a worshipful space within the hearts of the people, the timing of Sunday morning components will be reviewed by the Sunday Morning Experience Team. A subject matter expert in worship will be provided by the Center for Congregational Excellence to work with this team. The team will audit the Sunday morning experience with attention given to worship services, small group scheduling, space utilization, and flow issues. The team will present recommendations to the church council by March 15, 2020.

The existing Hospitality Team will consult with a subject matter expert provided by the Center for Congregational Excellence to assess the intentional hospitality of Wildwood UMC, to replicate what is working well and to strengthen areas of need by March 15, 2020.

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## *PRESCRIPTION #3: DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY*

*"As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God." - Psalm 42*

Growing in Christ is what every Christian is called to do, and we as the people of God are called to help one another in that process. The church will embark on developing a Pathway to Discipleship. The pastor, in consultation with the Coach, will appoint a 5-7 person team by July 31, 2020. The team will read and discuss the book *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*. The team will conduct the REVEAL study survey to assess the congregation's spiritual health.

After the REVEAL study results are received, the team will contact the Center for Congregational Excellence to schedule an Ascending Leaders workshop. Following the Ascending Leaders workshop, the team will develop a discipleship pathway to be shared with the church council on or before November 1, 2020.

The proclamation of the Word within a congregation is both the preacher to proclaim the Word and the congregation to hear and receive. The senior pastor, in consultation with the coach, will devise a plan for sermon development and evaluation.

## *PRESCRIPTION #4: COMPREHENSIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT*

*"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." - I Corinthians 12:12*

The goal of comprehensive staff development work is to pursue a more cohesive, collaborative and effective staff leadership team aligned with the vision of the church.

The senior pastor, in consultation with the coach, will develop a team building plan to foster relational and spiritual bonds between staff members. This will include a discipline of shared learning, worship, retreat, fun and missional activities. The plan will be completed by December 31, 2019.

The senior pastor, in consultation with the coach, will utilize Enneagram personality tests, the book *The Road Back to You*, by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, and other resources as needed to increase mutual awareness of strengths and weaknesses, an individualized plan for self-care and understanding of the staff's interaction styles.

The senior pastor and PPR chair, in consultation with the coach, will review the current staff structure in light of the new vision and make recommendations as needed by October 1, 2020.

The church council will benchmark staffing policies and best practices with vital churches with worship attendance of similar size to discern long range goals. This will include support, recognition and encouragement of staff members. (The Center for Congregational Excellence will provide a Benchmark Report by October 31, 2019.)

**Celebrate Success:** Two months after the completion of their last prescription, Wildwood UMC will hold a service of celebration and vision. This will allow the community to rejoice in their growth

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through the VCI process, reflect on their current ministry, and share excitement about their next steps.

## CONCLUSION

We, the consultation team, want to thank you for the opportunity to serve your congregation in this manner. Our prayers and hope for your congregation is that God will use this process to help you implement your mission more effectively, utilize your compelling vision through a developed plan, and thereby make an eternal difference in the Wildwood UMC community for the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Mike Tyson, Lead Consultant  
Dr. Roy James, VCI Coach  
Rev. John Stephenson, VCI Team Member  
Rev. Bryan Harkness, VCI Team Member  
Dr. Craig Gilbert, VCI Team Member  
Susan Burnell, APR, Scribe  
Martie Belt, Scribe

## TOWN HALL MEETING DATES:

Thursday, October 10	Hayley Hall	6:30 pm
Monday, October 21	Room 303	6:30 pm
Thursday, October 24	Hayley Hall	6:30 pm
Sunday, October 27	Choir Room	10:00 am

## CHURCH CONFERENCE DATE:

Thursday, November 14	Hayley Hall	6:30 pm
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