

For the Next Generation

By Rev. Doug Gilreath and Rev. Jan McCoy

“God, make us uncomfortable” is a prayer we as pastors often pray but seldom mean. A few years ago, several of our staff leadership team at Covington First UMC started feeling “uncomfortable” with our seemingly well-meant efforts of ministry and missions. We felt as if we were doing many different ministries and missions, but we wondered if we were actually being effective in making a difference in our community. As a staff, we felt somehow unfocused and uncomfortable. So we started talking about what it means to be effective in ministry and missions. This conversation led us to take staff retreats to talk about how to be more focused in ministry and how to better use the resources that had been entrusted to us by people and by God to help people in our community.

“Without prophetic vision people run wild, but blessed are those who follow God’s teachings” (Proverbs 29.18, GW).

Without leadership toward a vision of where God wants to lead the church, the people run around aimlessly grasping at straws and doing everything, while not really focusing on the direction God wants to lead. For a while, many of our efforts seemed to be the latter – getting involved in the next big thing, and then the next until we were spread wafer thin as a staff and as a church. So we started thinking about our vision statement. Did we have one? What was it? Was it ever published? Was it even still applicable? We discovered that somewhere in the past, the church leadership had developed a vision statement, and for a while, it was used in publications and people knew it. However, somewhere along the line, that vision statement had disappeared into stacks of past bulletins covers, and the vision as people remembered it had soon after been mostly abandoned. So our church leadership decided it was time to revisit and to Re-Vision.

With help from the Conference Office of Church Development, the church developed and established a vision statement, a standard or roadmap by which all of our ministries and missions are now measured. Common questions we ask about any new or even established ministry is “Does this activity reflect or continue to reflect our vision? Does it help us live out our mission as a church?”

Over the last few years, we have been able to focus our attention and energy on events

and activities which help us to reach our vision for the church, and we have given ourselves permission to exclude activities which do not meet those criteria.

In keeping with our vision, *"We are charged by God to ensure that the next generation of this community will have a relationship with Jesus Christ,"* we are exploring different ways to reach the next generation of people in our community. The "next generation" may be the kids being born now, or they may be people who have written church out of their lives. The next generation may be people who are "done" with the church because they have been hurt in some way, or it may be those who have never even been to a church.

Earlier this year, when we read about the NExT Leadership program offered by Church Development, we were all in. This nine-month process seemed like what we needed to continue to live into our vision for the church to reach the next generation for Jesus Christ. In the past, we have discovered that when only one person attends a conference, it's impossible to bring back all the learned to everyone else on the team. We as pastors felt that it would be important for those who develop and plan the core programming for the church to be included in this leadership conference so that we dream and plan in the same direction.

So, our two pastors and three of our staff members representing communications, program, and finance are taking this series of classes together. What will bubble out of this learning process, we have yet to discover, but we as a staff are growing together and discovering what it means to be more effective leaders in our church and community as we read, study, work and dream together.

We can't wait to see what God has in store for us as a church and as a community, and with NExT Leadership training, we will be ready to seize opportunities as they arise.

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