



Harvester United Methodist Church

Strategic Visioning Document October 2007

Visioning Team:

Pastor Paul Massingill
Jennifer Smith
Martha Kronk
Ruth Reilly
Kim Little
Sidney Moss
Robert Taylor
Matt High

Our Mission

The Mission of Harvester UMC is to invite people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our Vision

The Vision of Harvester UMC is to become a community of faith that...
Welcomes people, just as they are, into a loving and diverse community;
Nurtures people by teaching them to follow Jesus and to genuinely care for one another;
Equips people to get involved in God's work and serve others; and
Seeks out people to share Jesus' love with them.

Our Values

The following statements reflect values we believe are at the core of the Christian life. We seek to embrace and embody these values as an expression of our life together as a community of Jesus followers at Harvester United Methodist Church.

- We believe that the Bible is God's word, contains all we need to know about God and salvation, and serves as our primary authority for life, faith, and practice.¹
- We believe that lost people matter to God, and therefore, ought to matter to the church.²
- We believe the church is not a building, but rather a community of people who are called and sent out into the world to share the love of Jesus with others.³
- We believe worship is our response - both individually and as a community - to God for who He is and what He has done. This response is not limited to a place, time, or style; rather, worship is a life lived fully for God.⁴
- We believe we are asked to accept people just as they are and serve them as Jesus served us.⁵
- We believe building authentic, personal, intergenerational, and racially and ethnically diverse relationships is essential to living and sharing our faith.⁶
- We believe that small groups are essential to learning God's word and growing disciples.⁷
- We believe in the power and significance of prayer, the value of discernment, the importance of faithful stewardship, and the blessing of others through hospitality.⁸
- We believe a community of Jesus followers should reflect the diversity of God's creativity and beauty.⁹

Our Strategies

The following are strategies for growing into God's vision for our church. While these specifics may change in a future we cannot see or anticipate with certainty, we at this point feel called to pursue ministry in the following ways and in the following areas...

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 19:7-14, John 1:1-18, John 3:16-21

² Luke 15, Luke 19:10

³ Acts 2:42-47, Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:16-20, 1 John 4:7-21, 1 Corinthians 12-13, Romans 12

⁴ Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:12-17, Hebrews 13:15-16

⁵ John 13:1-17, Philippians 2:1-11, Matthew 25:31-46, John 8:1-11, Matthew 7:1-5, James 4:7-12, Luke 14, Matthew 15:21-28, Acts 11:1-18

⁶ John 4:1-42, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Ephesians 2, Galatians 5:25-29

⁷ Acts 2:42-47

⁸ Genesis 1:26-31, Hebrews 13:1-2, Matthew 25:14-30, Matthew 6, Luke 11:1-13, Romans 12:2, 13

⁹ Ephesians 2, Revelation 21-22:5, Genesis 1-2, Galatians 5:25-29, Revelation 7:9-17

The Vision of Harvester UMC is to become a community of faith that...welcomes people, just as they are, into a loving and diverse community...

Our community continues to grow and change dramatically. New subdivisions and schools, retail centers, and related infrastructure are transforming the community in complex ways. Along with these changes, we anticipate the community will also continue to grow in its racial, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. So as we live into this future, we know that to become a welcoming community of faith that embraces people just as they are, we will need to find ways in ministry to foster and grow meaningful, personal, intentional relationships among a diverse range of people. To this end, we will seek to...

Provide worship opportunities that embody and reflect the diversity of the kingdom of God. Different generations, different ethnic groups, or simply different individuals, seek to worship and praise God in unique and personal ways. We celebrate this and believe our worship life should embrace and reflect this diversity through worship opportunities that are indigenous to the people of our immediate community. So as our community grows and changes, we are committed to providing - in the best and most faithful ways we can - worship experiences that help people know, experience, and praise the living God.

Develop a comprehensive assimilation process. As a church, we want to be intentional about getting people started and keeping people connected to Jesus. So we will develop a comprehensive process to help welcome, assimilate, connect, nurture, grow, equip, and then send out those trying to follow Jesus. From the first handshake or mug delivery, through the profession of faith and commitment of membership, and for as long as people are under the care of our congregation, we will be intentional in helping them discover and use their spiritual gifts, develop relationships with other Christians, form their character through intentional discipleship, and grow their faith through meaningful service.

Create venues and programs for the sharing of food, fellowship, and hospitality. There is something about food and sharing a meal that brings people together. How often in the Gospels do we see Jesus breaking bread and sharing fellowship with people? Sharing food and fellowship at the table fosters understanding and builds relationship. So we want to be a people who are intentional about our breaking bread and find ways to share Jesus' love, overcome our differences and prejudices, and embrace one another in fellowship across socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic lines. Specific expressions of this commitment might include any or all of the following:

- Regular programming at Harvester centered around meals that are open to and available for those in need in our midst;
- The creation of a "free restaurant" and/or coffee house somewhere in our local community in which all would have the opportunity to serve and be served in Christian hospitality.
- *Develop "Hospitality Houses"*. These homes might serve a variety of purposes - transitional housing for families in crisis; respite for pastors on leave or missionaries serving abroad on furlough; a place to host guest artists, musicians, or others who may be visiting our congregation. Whatever the need, the "hospitality house" would be available to offer the safety, warmth, and comfort of Christian hospitality.

The Vision of Harvester UMC is to become a community of faith that...nurtures people by teaching them to follow Jesus and to genuinely care for one another

Faith is a journey, and for that journey we need traveling companions, brothers and sisters in Christ who are also seeking to love God, love others, and follow the way of Jesus. At Harvester, we aspire to be a community committed to discipleship and formation, a community in which we are all both teachers and learners, a community in which we take seriously our responsibility to mentor, care for, and walk with one another. In seeking this, we hope our future ministry to and with one another includes the following...

A long-term, church-wide commitment to adult small group discipleship. Small groups are the heart and soul of adult discipleship in our congregation. It is most often in and through small groups - and the friendships formed in such groups - that people experience significant growth in their relationship with God

and relationships with other Christians. So we will continue to intentionally move people into small groups of formation, study, prayer, and accountability. Furthermore, our hope and expectation is that these groups will not be viewed as something that necessarily happens on the church property but rather will meet in people's homes and businesses, neighborhoods, coffee shops, restaurants, etc.

A passionate, intentional commitment to the Christian formation of children & youth. Children and youth have always been central to life at Harvester. We are tasked by God with raising children in the faith, and it is a promise we make to God and to families when we baptize their children. So from birth to whenever they may leave our sphere of influence as young adults, we commit to investing deeply in our young people. Through regular programming, teaching, and mentoring, we will help our families produce spiritual champions who change the world for Christ for generations to come.

Developing a network of need-based, life-giving support groups. All people go through difficult times or wrestle with significant struggles and need the support and encouragement of people experiencing similar things. So as a way to help people care for one another, we commit to being a community where people can find support. Through developing partnerships with other churches, opening our facilities to outside organizations, and offering the gifts, expertise, and experiences of our own members, we will provide opportunities for people to connect with and offer care for one another.

Developing a Christian preschool to serve the families of our congregation and surrounding community. A specific way in which we can begin forming our children as followers of Jesus is creating an intentionally Christian environment for the early childhood years. This preschool would not be simply another daycare or child care center; rather, it would be a place that teaches, forms, and shapes children in the way of Jesus. We envision this being an outgrowth of the Children's Ministry at Harvester. The school would strive to foster deep parental involvement so that parents could learn how to best nurture their children in the faith.

The Vision of Harvester UMC is to become a community of faith that...equips people to get involved in God's work and serve others

Jesus said he came to serve, not to be served. In a profound act of humility, Jesus knelt at the feet of his disciples and friends and washed their feet, an act of a servant, and then commanded us to do the same as a sign of our love for one another. So to follow Jesus is to serve others. We also believe that Jesus is at work in the world even when Christians or the church are not; and so we want to think in terms of God's work in the world for the sake of His Kingdom and not make our work at the church the focus of who we are as a congregation. We want to join God where He is at work already, with the church serving as a place to develop and equip Christians to faithfully be in and among the world. We also feel an important part of equipping is experiential. We learn by doing, and we equip others by working alongside them. So a part of equipping people to serve in the world is to take them into the world to serve and facilitate opportunities for them to get involved in God's work outside the doors of the church. To this end, we propose to...

Foster involvement in our area Emmaus community. The Walk to Emmaus, Chrysalis, and Kairos weekend retreat experiences are powerful times of God's outpouring of grace and personal spiritual growth. Involvement in Emmaus weekends and Emmaus communities (gatherings of people who have experienced weekend retreats) teaches people to give and receive grace, grows laity in their ability and confidence in sharing testimony, embodies the humility of Christian servanthood, encourages the practice of Christian spiritual disciplines, and enables cooperative ministry with other Christian congregations. So we will commit to sending people on weekends and being involved in our local Emmaus communities.

Develop a comprehensive Lay Leadership Development Program. People need training, teaching, mentoring, and coaching to help them live faithfully and practice their faith in all areas of life. We need to be intentional in giving Christians the tools and formation to live faithful lives in their homes, workplaces, and in the larger community. As part of this, we commit specifically to...

- Offer seminars, classes, retreats, and other opportunities that train people specifically in Christian parenting, stewardship and personal finances, marriage enrichment, etc.;

- Intentionally identify, encourage, and invest in people who are discerning calls to various forms of vocational ministry (aspiring missionaries, pastors, and local church leaders) who emerge from among our own congregation;
- Develop a Spiritual Growth Center on the Harvester campus designed to be a place in which people from our church and community may get connected to resources designed to help further them in their walk with Christ. These resources might include any or all of the following: resources for Christian pilgrimage and travel, books and other materials to encourage personal piety and Christian discipline, access to spiritual directors and/or Christian coaching, and further development of our grounds to better enable personal reflection and retreat.

Cultivate the creative arts and develop a community of artists at Harvester. One of the important ways in which the divine connects with secular, non-church people is through the arts. And one of the unique ways in which we are able to reflect the image of our Creator is through our creativity and co-creation of that which is beautiful, whether it is a sonnet, a song, or a sculpture. So in a variety of ways, we want to encourage the creative arts and train up our people (particularly our young people) to be artists through

- Emphasizing and encouraging creativity in worship services and other programming as an expression of praise to our Creator;
- Assisting visual and performing artists in developing and sharing their gifts with the body of Christ and larger world;
- Designing, creating, and preserving aesthetic beauty in the further development of our property and facilities; and
- Teaching our young people to value creation and creativity.

Creation of a “Mission Year” expectation for our young people and young adults. As part of raising our young people to be spiritual champions and world changers, we will establish an expectation that all Harvester young people, sometime after they graduate high school but before they reach age 25, should spend at least one year in Christian service well outside of their “comfort zone” of Harvester. Whether it is through a partner relationship with another church or ministry developed by Harvester, or something the young person seeks out on their own, the church would encourage our young adults to go out and serve for an extended period as an important act of transformative discipleship.

The Vision of Harvester UMC is to become a community of faith that...seeks out people to share Jesus’ love with them...

As Christians, we are a missional people called to share the love of Jesus with a world filled with hurting and broken people who don’t have a clue God is real and that He loves them passionately. Everything else we do – our welcoming and worship, our nurturing and discipleship, our equipping and training – all leads us to sharing Jesus’ love with others, both in our community and around the world. We are called to be people who seek out and save the lost, to go out into the world and make disciples, and to be witnesses to the very ends of the earth. As an expression of this, we will seek to...

Take the church into the community in intentional and varied ways. The church is a people, not a building. We want to be a people who “have church” and “do church” where people live and work – in the community. We want to be Jesus’ people and presence *in the world*. To do this, we intend to continue to find ways to worship, fellowship, serve, and disciple people through programs and opportunities offered outside our walls and away from our property. We expect this to include any or all of the following:

- Leading worship in various venues and contexts both in our local community and beyond;
- Offering small groups and fellowship opportunities in neighborhoods, businesses, homes, community centers, restaurants, prisons, nursing homes, etc.;
- Developing (and training our people for) non-threatening, relational forms of personal evangelism.

Serve the poor and homeless in our community through the development of a Central Pasco Resource Center. Our immediate community lacks resources for the poor and homeless. The assistance that does exist is almost always located on either end of the county (New Port Richey in the west, Zephyrhills and

Dade City in the east), and there is virtually no public transportation. So we feel God leading us to become a Resource Center for our area, to open our doors and church life in intentional ways to the poor and those who serve them. This might include any or all of the following:

- Providing space in our facility to serve as a clearinghouse for resources and services to care for those experiencing crisis and need;
- Providing emergency, temporary on-site housing and shower facilities (which could also better enable the Harvester campus to support visiting mission teams);
- Develop strategic partnerships with agencies and other ministries to seek out relationships with those in need around us, as well as the opening and sharing of our facilities in generous ways to those in need and those who serve them

Transitional housing for young adults. Through our recent involvement with JFJ Ministries, as well as other situations God has brought across our path, we have become aware of a particular need that we are feeling called to address – issues of homelessness and transitional housing among young adults. As an outgrowth of our commitment to children and young people, we feel called to create a transitional housing program in which we provide a safe and structured Christian living environment for young adults who have no other place to go and no other community to help form and shape them in this critical stage of growing independence and maturity. While this initiative may include partnership with other churches, ministries, or agencies, we envision this as a genuine outgrowth of Harvester’s ministry that would remain intimately connected with the life and community of the congregation.

Foster relationships with congregations in other parts of the world. The United States is quickly becoming one of the largest mission fields in the world. Whereas the gospel is spreading in dramatic ways around the globe, particularly in the developing world, here at home our society grows more and more secular. For a couple of centuries, we have been the sender of missionaries; now, the missionaries need to come to us. So we want to find ways to foster relationships with congregations in other parts of the world and learn from our brothers and sisters around the globe about faithfulness, the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit, and the significance of the local church. Using advances in technology, travel and mission experiences, and a variety of other means, we will seek to develop mutually beneficial relationships in which we engage in dialogue, exchange pastors and members, trips and pilgrimages, and otherwise share in ministry together.

Regular mission experiences and missionary support. We think getting outside of our community and comfort zone is absolutely vital in growing and challenging our faith. We also want to support and encourage those who have been called to give themselves completely to a community, country, or people in service and the sharing of the Gospel. Specifically, this may include any or all of the following:

- Regular short-term mission trips for youth and adults, including opportunities to serve internationally;
- Identifying specific missionaries or mission initiatives to support financially and in other ways;
- Partnering with mission agencies and other organizations in strategic ways to make a significant impact for Christ in particular communities or through particular projects. In other words, not simply giving money to groups but building relationships and providing informed, intentional support to particular people and projects we feel called to support.