

Recommendations of Elders' Task Force for Creating and Sustaining a Safe and Welcoming Community

FCC Edmond's strategic plan included the following strategy and action step:

Key Strategy 2. Continue developing as a “safe” community (emotionally and spiritually) in which faith and Christian love are central and diversity of all kinds is sought. This will mean connecting with each other by listening to, educating ourselves to, and respecting one another’s various perspectives, strengths and weaknesses; engaging all of us in various experiences and reflection upon those experiences; and coming to see our differences as gifts. It will also mean being intentional about developing a sense of unity and identity even as we offer many options for worship, learning, service and action. While some of our programs will be generation-specific, many will be cross-generational (many generations involved together).

Action step # 4. One staff person and 3-4 elders form a task force that meets over the course of three months or so to develop ways to help FCC, on an ongoing basis, continue to become a “safe” place/community without making the most “different” among us feel uncomfortable (this may require workshops or other approaches that address both the knowledge and skills of members in regard to diversity and that address the “ethos” or atmosphere of FCC). (Key Strategy 2)

In response to the strategic plan Dana Shadid, moderator of the elders, formed a special task which included elders Larry Mullins, Dana Theobald, Charles Weddle, Marcy Williams and senior minister, Chris Shorow. The first meeting was May 27 and the final meeting of the task force was August 28.

Over this period of three months, the task force facilitated or participated in the following:

- conversations with “experts” in discernment and dealing with difficult issues that might divide congregations and/or make people feel unwelcome;
- conversations with members of the church that might be considered different (as relates to gender, marital status, disability, gender preference, etc.) to determine what we do right and what we might do better;
- research of curriculum and processes that might exist that could be used in our current structure to educate and facilitate conversations;
- one on one conversations with church members;
- conversations with Sunday School classes;
- small group discussions during a summer Sunday school session;
- sermons and summer Sunday school presentations by Disciple “experts” – Dick Hamm, John Imbler, Newell Williams and Dean Phelps.

After this gathering of information and insights, the task force would like to make the following recommendations for continuing the dialogue and building a safe and welcoming community. We divide them into areas of discernment, education, communication and welcoming/fellowship.

- I. **DISCERNMENT:** Develop and implement an ongoing process of discernment that allows the members of FCC Edmond to discuss difficult/controversial/emotional topics in a civil, respectful and meaningful way and does not create divisions or feelings of being unwelcome.
 - a. Dr. John Harms, a member of FCC Edmond, developed a process of discernment that is available for us to use as a foundation piece. In addition, Dick Hamm has shared a process that he has used in congregations dealing with difficult topics.
 - b. Determine what works best for FCC:
 - i. Process
 - ii. Timing
 - iii. Location
 - iv. Other variables of successful implementation
 - c. Pilot the process, evaluate, make changes where and if needed, continue the process.

- II. **EDUCATION:** Incorporate a variety of curriculum and processes into existing education structure and add new groups (Sunday School classes, small groups, bible studies) when necessary.
 - a. Sunday School curriculum – provide a variety of options for Sunday School sessions that allow for scriptural based discussions on social issues; ex. "Confronting the Controversies, Biblical Perspectives on Tough Issues" by Adam Hamilton, "Handbook for Disciples" by Duane Cummins, and other books/curriculum that are identified by the Education Committee and ministerial staff;
 - b. UNITE – continue to provide adult options in this format as Chris and Jerry are doing in the fall semester;
 - c. Provide education tools for youth Sunday School and small groups that are not contradictory of messages they are hearing in other conversations in church
 - d. Possibly add more classes focusing on bible study or provide options for enlarging current classes;
 - e. More small groups when needs present themselves – for education and to build relationships;
 - f. More presentations by outside “experts” when the opportunities present themselves.

- III. **COMMUNICATION:** Evaluate current communication tools to ensure the message of who and what FCC Edmond is and believes is being shared, especially on the FCC Edmond website since this is the method of choice for younger generations to “shop” for everything, even churches.
 - a. Website
 - i. Update to incorporate biblical references to beliefs and values;

- ii. Detailed information on all Sunday schools (age groups, couples/singles, curriculum, type of study – lecture or discussion, etc.)
 - iii. Detailed information on all that is available for attendees (small groups, bible study, etc.)
 - iv. Keep updated
 - b. More information on church leadership – who are they and what do they do?
 - c. Chalice Connection – continue to work to ensure this is a document read by as many as possible;
 - d. Utilize church bulletin and power point presentations prior to services to communicate and educate about FCC Edmond and Disciples of Christ;
 - e. Utilize current tools (like bread ministry) to share more information about the church and Disciples of Christ with visitors;
 - f. What resources are available to all? What other methods can be used to get this information to those who need it?
- IV. WELCOMING/FELLOWSHIP/SAFETY
- a. Increase the number of greeters and supply them with more detailed information on Sunday school classes and other Sunday morning opportunities; help members recruit more members for this important duty;
 - b. Research and incorporate new ways to identify members and visitors:
 - i. Nametags?
 - ii. Sign in sheets?
 - iii. Visitor tags (somehow to know immediately if someone is a member)?
 - iv. Other???
 - c. Make sure that the security teams are well trained and prepared for all issues; pay especially close attention to the nursery so parents feel good about leaving their children there;
 - d. Consider reinstating dinner club for members;
 - e. In an effort to make connections with UCO students, consider putting in place a program similar to other college communities where members of the church “adopt” a student from UCO – bring them to church, take them out to dinner afterwards or have them over for Sunday dinner;
 - f. More physical opportunities for members/visitors with physical disabilities to sit closer to the front of the church if so desired.

Since the successful implementation of these recommendations require different ministries incorporating them in their plans for coming months and years, the task force hopes that the leadership of the ministries will consider these things carefully when planning. Obviously, several will require cooperative action between ministries and we believe this can happen, too. Education is a very large piece of these recommendations, and because of that, members of this task force have agreed to continue to work with Rev. Shorow to participate in the development and implementation of the discernment process, as well as provide support for the expansion of the education process.

(back up notes from a variety of meetings are on file and available for those ministries looking for more specific guidance)