

# Austin Westlake United Methodist Church

## HCI Consultation Report

October 25 – 27, 2013

We are grateful for the cooperation and honesty that has been shared with the team by the members and staff of Westlake United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas. Everyone has been very helpful and provided us with all the information that was required for us to conduct this consultation. Our prayer is that God will use this report and this process to motivate and empower the congregation to do great things for the Lord's Mission in this community and beyond.

### STRENGTHS

1. Loving and Caring Community. Westlake was described by several of the mystery guests as a kind, polite, friendly, sincere and welcoming church. One of the ways this was conveyed was through the worship service experience. They sensed a good spirit from the Westlake congregation for helping other people. This was confirmed by the lay persons and the focus group we interviewed. The pastors are appreciated and loved by the church community.
2. Human and Material Resources. We are excited about the church's future, not in small part because of the human and material resources available within the congregation. This congregation is financially strong and has very little debt which leaves resources free for creative new ministries. A good foundation for ministry into the future has been laid, making Westlake UMC a church with great potential to reach people for Christ.
3. Facility Use by Community - Westlake is a neighborhood church with a spacious and relatively new building that offers a wonderful context for doing ministries and provides space for the community's use. Building M, for example, is home to Mobile Loaves and Fishes, S.C.O.R.E., and a professional counselor.
4. Missions and Service – There is an open spirit, a heart for service, and a desire to effect transformation of people's lives. People are generously investing time and resources in multiple outreach ministries. There has been a history of giving to missions from the very beginning of this congregation. This is illustrated by Foundations for the Homeless, Reconciling Ministries Network, N.A.M.I., Any Baby Can, and many, many, many more.
5. Westlake UMC Pre-School. The pre-school is well known in the community and is highly regarded as one of the premier pre-schools of its type in Austin. Because of this, there are a large number of young families from the community coming in and out of the building every week.

### CONCERNS

1. Direction and Focus. There is no clear direction or focus that unifies the congregation. Because of this, there is little evidence of a clear and compelling vision for carrying out the mission of the church, which is to make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Therefore, programming and activities are not well prioritized or aligned with the mission of the church.

The mission of the church is to make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, but it is not being implemented here with any degree of consistency. Though many people are working hard, many dollars are being invested, lots of energy is being expended to run the multiple outreach ministries, few if any, new disciples are coming into the life of the congregation.

2. Staff and Alignment. In the absence of a clear and compelling vision, staff has been hired to meet programming needs. There has been a high rate of turnover amongst lay staff and there appears to be low morale, compartmentalized programs, and unclear lines of communication. Ministry objectives are unclear. There is no effective accountability structure. There are inconsistencies among job descriptions, goal setting, and evaluation.

3. Organizationally Challenged. There are too few people doing the work of the church and supporting the ministries. This suggests an absence of a clearly defined system. Too many leaders are busy and over-extended. There is not an effective system for mobilizing, training, and retaining lay leaders. Planning is not cohesive and no clear ministry goals are present. The current system does not marry accountability, authority, and responsibility into a process of leadership and decision-making. The leadership structure of the church is cumbersome, repetitive, and inhibits the effectiveness of the church's ministries.

4. Children, Youth, and Families. We consistently heard from laity and staff of a need to improve ministry with children, youth, and families. Although there are hard-working dedicated volunteers and leaders in these vital areas of ministry, these programs are not where they need to be given the demographics of the community. Broader opportunities and newer models of ministries are needed to reach additional children, youth, and their families.

According to the MissionInsite report, 83% of the households within five miles of Westlake UMC have school-aged children. The 10 year MissionInsite projection indicates that the population of school age children will nearly double. However, the current ministries of children and youth are not connecting with as large a number of students as in previous years.

5. Connecting and Discipleship Pathway. The mystery worshippers gave high ratings for the warmth and friendliness of the congregation. However, these same people, when asked if they would return, overwhelmingly responded "no." The church feels friendly but seems to struggle helping new people belong and connect. There is a feeling of family at Westlake UMC; however, it is difficult for new people to enter into the church. This has led to a wide back door. There is an expressed desire for more fellowship and more opportunities to connect with the Westlake family.

The layout of the facilities inhibits people connecting. These are newer facilities, however, there is limited gathering space, which leads to the feeling "I can't find my place."

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a first step to becoming a church that makes more new disciples of Jesus Christ, the pastor will call the leaders and congregation to a Day of Prayer. The congregation will gather to pray for a collective and individual marshalling of its resources to lead more people to Jesus Christ. There will also be prayer for a renewed vision, energy, and strategy for reaching the community in which this church exists. This day will be led by someone other than the Pastor, chosen in consultation with the coach. It will occur on or by **January 15, 2014**.

1. Mission, Vision, and Planning: Upon acceptance of this report, Westlake UMC will adopt as its mission “to make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” By **February 15, 2014**, the coach will conduct a Day of Visioning with the congregation. Following that event, a vision statement will be cast by the pastor and blessed by leadership on or before **March 15, 2014**.

By **April 30, 2014**, the coach, in consultation with the pastor, will conduct a Strategic Planning Retreat with the leadership (clergy, program, and lay). Following the retreat, a task force of 3-5 people named by the pastor in consultation with the coach will be formed to conduct a Mission and Ministry Audit that gauges alignment of the ministries of the church with the mission and new vision. The Mission and Ministry Audit Task Force will report back to the Church Council by **November 15, 2014** with their findings. Ministries not demonstrating alignment with the mission, vision, and fruitfulness will be given a year to enhance their ability to connect with and disciple new people. This will be done by **November 15, 2015**. Ministries that do not demonstrate alignment and fruitfulness will be presented to the Church Council to determine next steps. There are multiple resources available to help ministries become aligned and fruitful.

2. Staff and Leadership: By **May 30, 2014**, all staff will take a full day to retreat together in order to align job descriptions with the mission and vision of the church. Susan Beaumont’s, *Stepping Up to Supervision*, is a helpful resource in aligning job descriptions with the mission and vision. This retreat will be led by an outside professional selected by the coach. The cost of this retreat will be paid for by the church.

The pastor, in consultation with the coach and three SPRC representatives, will develop a system to evaluate paid and unpaid staff in order to align staff with the mission, vision, goals, and financial resources of the church on or before **August 30, 2014**. By **November 1, 2014**, the pastor will have reconstructed the staff in consultation with the coach in order to implement the mission of the church and achieve growth.

3. Organizational Structure: The pastor, in consultation with the coach, will develop a process to equip and empower current leaders as well as identify and equip future ministry leaders. This process will be developed on or before **January 30, 2014** and implemented on an ongoing basis. The process will be launched with a Lay Leadership Development course (LLD) course starting on or before **March 1, 2014**. The purpose of this process is to prepare leaders to participate in an accountable model of leadership.

Upon adoption of this report, the church will commit to the implementation of an accountability model of leadership. Staff and lay teams will set goals in light of the mission and vision of the church and be held accountable to fulfill those goals. In this model, the Church Council governs, the pastor leads, the staff (paid and unpaid) manage, and the congregation does “hands on” ministry. This model needs to be fully implemented as soon as possible, but no later than **January 1, 2015**. The coach, in consultation with the pastor will identify resources and provide training to implement the Single Board model.

4. Children, Youth, and Families.

A team of 3-5 people will be selected by the pastor in consultation with the coach by **March 1, 2014** to investigate 3 effective Sunday morning and mid-week church children and youth programs. They will then evaluate Westlake’s current children’s and youth ministries in relationship to the best practices that they have just learned and implement the improvements by **August 1, 2014**.

By **February 2015**, a team of 3-5 people named by the pastor, in consultation with the coach, will develop an intentional outreach paradigm that targets unchurched children, youth, and their families in the community, beginning with the more than 150 children who, along with their families, are already engaged with the church through the Westlake United Methodist Church Pre-School. This must include at least 2 outwardly focused events in which the whole church will participate to reach children, youth, and families that Westlake UMC does not yet know.

5. Connecting and Discipling. There are two areas of focus with regard to “connecting” and discipling people with Christ through the church – one is connecting people who are “inside” the walls. The other is connecting with people we do not yet know in the community.

A. Connecting with people “inside” the walls. The pastor will select, in conjunction with coach, 3-5 people by **March 1, 2014** to review Westlake’s internal follow-up and connecting procedures for first-time worship guests and with persons who use the building in the many ongoing programs. The team will develop and implement a connection and new discipleship plan by **June 1, 2014**, and evaluate it quarterly for effectiveness through **June 1, 2015**.

B. Connecting with people “outside” the walls. The pastor will conduct a 4 – 6 week sermon series on *Get their Name: How to Build New Relationships with People You Don’t Know* (Farr, Anderson, Kotan). Concurrent with the sermon series, a church-wide study campaign will be held for all age groups in the **Fall of 2014**. In conjunction with the children and youth’s outwardly focused events (see above), a team of 3-5 people will follow up with the new names Westlake receives to connect them with the life of the church.

C. The Trustees will conduct a facilities audit and determine any building improvements needed to refresh and facilitate a better first impression and hospitality space for new people. The Trustees are to report to the Church Council on or before **May 1, 2015** with their recommendations.

## CONCLUSION

We, the consulting 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 implement your mission effectively, create a compelling vision, and make an eternal difference in Austin for the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Bob Farr, Lead Consultant  
Rev. Jack Gause  
Rev. Dr. Ruben Saenz Jr.

Rev. Dr. Ralph Mann, Coach  
Rev. John McMullen  
Rev. Dr. Tina Carter

Rev. Mimi Raper  
Dionisio Salazar  
Rev. Robert Clark

### Town Hall Meetings:

Sunday	November 3, 2013	3:00 pm	Fellowship Classroom, M134
Tuesday	November 12, 2013	6:30 pm	Fellowship Classroom, M134
Monday	November 18, 2013	10:00 am	Fellowship Classroom, M134

All Church Conference will be held @ 6:30 on Thursday, December 5, 2013.