



The New Beginnings Leadership Report for Session

Introduction

The Visioning team was charged with the task of determining a path forward for church development more than two years ago. In the summer of 2015, Blackhawk Presbytery offered the New Beginnings Program to assist churches with this type of task. The program consisted of an assessment completed by an outside consultant, a series of small group meetings and then an evaluation from the church's internal Visioning Team.

The report summarizes the activities that have taken place since the start of this program. It also documents the team's foundation for the recommendations as well as the recommendations to Session for approval. The last section of this report also maps out a recommendation of the role of the Visioning team to make sure that progress of these recommendations are tracked and promoted and that we have a focus on what God is calling our church and its members to be in the future.

This reflects a general take away of the last year that assessment of what God is calling us to be shouldn't be a once in a five to ten year initiative. We need to ask this question more often and not be afraid to try new ideas and not see new ideas as a threat to our history and heritage. We also need to be aware that not all of the ideas in this report will be deemed as viable or the idea may be a longer term project to consider later.

Program Summary

The New Beginning process was started in August 2015. The first step was to have an onsite visit from the consultant for meeting with the pastor, leadership, staff and a meeting with members of the congregation. The consultant toured the area, asked questions and collected information about our church during a day-long visit. The wrap up of that day was a meeting with as many of the congregation who could attend. We had 75 people at that meeting. The consultant prepared an assessment that looked at our church, our community and provided some potential scenarios for the future.

In September, we sent 11 of the congregation along with John Dillon to a leadership training to prepare them to facilitate the small group meetings. Per plan, there are supposed to be 6 meeting on specific topics provided by the guide for the program. We decided to start with a pot luck lunch in October to introduce what we were planning and complete the first session for the small groups together at the church. The remaining meetings took place at different times to provide options to adapt to people's schedules. The remaining meetings were held in October and November.

During December, we didn't plan any activities because of Christmas and scheduling conflicts. In January, the Visioning team and the New Beginnings leaders met to prepare a summary presentation to take place after the congregational meeting January 31, 2016. We wanted to share the consolidated data from the small groups and reassure the congregation that work was progressing.

One of the conclusions during the preparation for this meeting was all of the groups felt that more time could have been used for the last section for the dreaming big or future stories section. We scheduled another meeting for each small group in February to allow more discussion and feedback from the information provided in January.

During January through May, the Visioning team and the New Beginnings leaders met every other week to discuss the data and share additional resources to map out the recommendations from the team. These included the Book of Order, section G-1 0304 as well as other articles on church revitalization and a dictionary.

This team was in agreement that the New Beginnings program falls short after the group meetings. Churches have to determine how to proceed on their own. The program directed the churches to choose a way forward from four options: Do Nothing Different, Mission Redefinition, Redevelopment, or Close.

For our church, the choice was clear cut. We weren't closing, moving and we didn't want to do nothing. Our choice was Mission Redefinition, but what that was going to look like was where the hard work was required because there were no guideline as to what should be our output for this choice.

The team is in agreement that this lack of direction had its good and bad points. The best good point is the freedom for discussion with no "box" for our ideas to fit in. We looked at other material including books, articles, blogs and programs. Unfortunately, the good point led to our biggest bad point. There was a great deal of frustration because at times it felt like we would have liked to have a blueprint on how to build the box. There was also a sense of how do we judge when the work is complete.

One result that happened as we debated was change was already starting to happen. We have had building improvements, new programs, changes in Christian Ed, etc. All of these things were happening because this team was taking this concept of how can we improve and change to other teams and people in the congregation were looking at new ideas in a different light.

As we discussed the topic of what our future story needed to look like, we made the determination there will need to be ongoing visioning efforts, but we need to recommend a course of action to keep the momentum going for the congregation and we can also recommend a course of action for the Visioning team. We need to make sure that we continue to focus on what God is calling us to do in the future and make adjustments and improvements as needed.

Our Mission Redefinition Foundation

To begin, these recommendations hinge on a basic agreement by the team after all of our reading and discussion. Despite the concerns raised about our future including aging population, low attraction of new families, waning youth participation, burn out and fear of change, we decided that we can't focus on getting new members as the central focus. We need to focus on what God is calling us to do. By focusing our efforts on programs that address that question, attracting new families or getting more participation from youth or members in general will be a natural outcome.

Another point to keep in mind is that there is a theme of communication throughout these recommendations. Our church has a lot to offer now and we will continue to do more in the future. We want to make sure that there is awareness internally as well as awareness in our larger community. We aren't talking promotion for promotion sake, just making sure that our programs are available and accessible.

A new mission statement doesn't have to be a part of mission redefinition and we were in agreement that our Mission statement was fine. We also had the benefit that it had a quick reference built in. We determined that we needed to have a statement that defined the new beginnings initiative. We want to add a vision statement to our mission statement and its tag line to provide focus to our new programs and ideas.

Vision Statement

Ridgefield Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church: A Christian community known by our love, faith and discipleship; we gather, grow and go in grace.

Mission Statement

We gather in grace, connected by a sense of place and purpose with generations of faithful servant-leaders who journeyed before us. We seek to open our hearts as we open our doors - with room for everyone - and to open all our senses to God's life-affirming, life-changing presence through creative and diverse worship.

We grow in grace, not because we know all the answers - or even all the questions - but because we are drawn to God's word and Christ's example. We seek to be Christ's family here and now - to embrace each other as we are, to nurture who we might become, to celebrate with one another in good times and encourage one another in hard times, to listen and learn and lead.

We go in grace, challenged and strengthened by the Spirit to do God's work and show God's love in the world. We seek to look beyond our walls and beyond ourselves - to see God's image in every face, and to serve God's people in every place life leads us.

The journey continues in an ever-widening circle of grace.

"Tag" Line

We gather, we grow and we go in grace.

Focus

As we looked at all of the ideas that came in from the small groups, we spent a lot of time analyzing them and trying to form them into a cohesive program. One of the articles talked about a three legged stool for your solid foundation and we came to the conclusion that our mission statement and tag line had that built into it.

We gather... We want to have a focus on our congregation.

We grow... We want to provide opportunities for people to develop their faith and spiritual foundation.

We go... We want to share our faith with others and provide assistance to those in need.

The congregation, the individual and outreach were all represented. This led to adding components to each of these to help categorize the ideas from the small groups. Some of the ideas actually ended up being in more than one category.

For the Congregation, we determined that there were two components. The first one is Fellowship. This is a focus on how we care for one another and enjoy our church family and foster closer relationships with one another. The second was Leadership to focus on how we administer and run the church.

For the Individual, we determined that the components were Education and Worship. These two components are already defined and represented by the session committee structure.

For the Outreach, there were also two components. The first is the Community. We want to make our surrounding communities more aware of who we are and what is going on here. The second is Mission. We want to make sure that we continue to support initiatives locally and globally.

As we worked on this, a grid was developed. At the time, it was a discussion tool, but we may be able to leverage it for tracking. As you read through the recommendation section, you may find it helpful to use a reference. It can also be used in the future by teams as new ideas arise to make sure those new ideas fit with the overall focus. A completed version of this chart with the New Beginnings ideas is included later in the document.

RCLPC					
Ridgefield Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church: A Christian community known by our love, faith and discipleship; we gather, grow and go in grace					
Congregation (Gather)		Individual (Grow)		Outreach (Go)	
Fellowship	Leadership	Education	Worship	Community	Mission

Recommendations

Once the framework was agreed to, the team started taking the small group ideas and placing them in these categories. The team also tried to determine where the ideas needed to go in our existing committee structure.

There were also three ideas that span all of the groups. Improved communications, scheduling and training came up as all of the other ideas were discussed. These three don't fit into any one area. They are core components to success for the initiatives as a whole.

With improved communications, the focus was both inside of our church as well as with the community. We want communicate in a consistent manner across all of the channels we have decided to use. We need to do a better job of making sure activities are available and promoted. This needs to include the bulletin boards,

bulletins, the Spirit, email, calendars, web site and Facebook as well as outside media where appropriate. Additional details are in the Leadership and Community sections.

With scheduling, this is one that didn't come out of the small group meetings, but has definitely been a part of discussions in session and committee meetings. Examples of conflicts in this area include the Christmas pageant and Sunday School, the New members/Sunday School Teacher Recognition celebrations and trying to determine how to schedule the rummage sale, VBS and the RCLPC players. There needs to be an annual planning process to get as much on the calendar in advance to make it easier to schedule other smaller events around.

The last common idea was training. Some activities are already starting in this area. The Deacons are looking at developing a guide for Deacons. We are looking at training for greeters (hosts), ushers and communion servers/preparers. Across the board, we need to identify areas where instructions could be written or training conducted to make it easier for people to get involved.

If there are specific items for these three core ideas that need attention in the different sections, they will be highlighted.

Congregation - Fellowship

The Fellowship category focuses on improving how we care for one another and build stronger bonds in our church community. We want to encourage members to feel like this is their church home, get engaged and stay engaged as well as provide assistance in times of need. For the most part, these ideas need to go to the Deacons. With that said there are overlaps with other teams.

Better Training: It has been expressed that we need better training for people as they choose to get involved in leadership roles and assist with projects in the church. The Deacons are already developing a guide to assist new deacons. We also need keep training in mind with other activities. For example, what is involved to help with Cookie Walk; as a baker, helper, checkout, etc.

Scheduling and Communication: There are ideas detailed in the Leadership and Community sections involving these two topics. As different teams work on some of those ideas, there will be changes to how we schedule and communicate. For the Fellowship ideas, there needs to be extra effort to incorporate new scheduling and communication processes as needed.

Small Groups: During the small group meetings, there was a general agreement that participating in a small group was a benefit in itself because it gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better. We want to explore new small group opportunities for fellowship and learning. We want to explore opportunities both inside of our church as well as in the community. An example might be a fellowship time at a restaurant or other location. There have been some like the Sunday evenings at the beach, meeting at the Freeze, etc.

We may also want to consider groups that provide a new avenue for groups of potential participants. Several suggestions included something for working families, young singles, McHenry County College Students and young adults.

This is also shared with the Christian Education Team. They can focus on learning opportunities.

Building Utilization: An idea that came up as part of several others was the idea of better utilization of our building and grounds. We want to look at how we can use our building better or more. We want to look at scheduling to make it easier and less stressful. We want to look at what about our building holds us back from using it more. This one is shared between several teams.

New Member Welcome and Involvement: We want to look at what we do when new members and their families join the church to make sure that they feel comfortable and find opportunities to get engaged in activities. We have the family groups for each deacon and try and reach out to members, but we want to see if there are any additional ideas to help them settle in and feel at home.

Guests (Visitors) Welcome Plan: We want to look at what we are doing to welcome guests. We want to look at ways to encourage name tag use with members. There was also some information brought back from a leadership training that we should think of them as guests, not visitors and we are hosts.

“Care” Initiatives: During the discussions, the Stephen Ministry program was mentioned as something that was offered in the past. We need to look at what initiatives we have to support members of our church who are in need of support during an illness, grief and other stressful situations.

Another suggestion was possibly creating a program like Wednesday Warriors for errands and light repairs for members of our church who need assistance. This also may be an idea for Mission to extend that to the community.

Congregation - Leadership

For this section, there were several ideas that require analysis and changes to how we lead and administer the church and its services. Most of these ideas will fall to the Session and the Administration team.

Training: There was a lot of discussion that we could be preparing our leaders as well as members to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Again, this is an area where we are already working on these issues with the introduction of training for ushers and communion servers/preparers. We need to look at additional areas where training would be beneficial.

Currently our bylaws and policies require an annual joint meeting of Elders and Deacons. Our recommendation is that we should schedule a joint meeting. We recommend that it include training and joint discussions of ideas and projects to increase collaboration.

Scheduling: There have been occasions where we have had to make scheduling changes at the last minute to work around other events like trying to fit the Rummage Sale, Theatre and VBS in the month of June without issues. All teams need to start looking at scheduling from a longer point of view. For example, we know when church holidays, Voting Days, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day and congregation meetings occur and that we want to go to a different worship schedule on those weekends. We know we are going to have Cookie Walk, Teacher Appreciation and other standing events, but we should try to get those dates planned as soon as possible to enable the teams to plan around them.

We should also look at how best to handle scheduling for areas of the church better. This will be needed to support the idea to get better building utilization.

Communication: There were several ideas around communication for leadership. We want to explore and improve how we manage communications. We have different contacts for different types of communication (email, web, Facebook, community, bulletins, etc.) with different lead times and processes to get information in those channels.

We need to come up with a unified communication policy and would like to change the Community Outreach team to a Communications team. It would direct communication both internally in the church as well as externally in the community. Along with the Administration team, they also need to determine whether a policy or process is enough with task assignment and clarification or if we need a role of Communication Coordinator.

Role Clarity: Another idea that ran throughout our discussion was that we need to have the Session and Administration team examine the position/ role and committee responsibilities to make sure they are clear and that we don't have overlap and that there are no gaps. It is also the recommendation that we do not fill the youth director/leader position until we can determine what is specifically needed or if other position(s) are needed instead.

Another area to look at for roles is to look at managing volunteer recruitment. It was suggested that this might fit with nominating committee or with Deacons.

Engage Younger People: In addition to getting more involvement, we need to explore how to get younger members more involved and engaged. We need to see what is available and determine how best to let them know of these opportunities.

Individual – Education

These ideas are all for the Christian Education Team to explore and in some cases work is in progress.

Training: There was a lot of discussion that we could be preparing our leaders as well as members to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. We need to look at whether changes are needed in how we prepare teachers to teach.

Scheduling: Every effort should be made to schedule as far in advance as soon as possible to enable the teams to plan around them.

We should also look at how best to handle scheduling for areas of the church better. This will be needed to support the idea to get better building utilization.

Communication: Once the new communication plan is in place, make every effort to get the information about education out there as early as possible.

Small Groups: The idea to develop programs for small groups is shared with the Fellowship section.

Youth Leadership: We need to explore do we need a youth director or do we need to shift roles and responsibilities around to meet the needs for youth leadership. This will be in conjunction with the Administration team.

Youth Group Participation: We need to explore new ideas to get more of the youth involved and determine what the program should look like. It should include both Sunday School and Fellowship opportunities.

Curriculum: We need to explore how our curriculum and class offerings should change to give a cohesive learning plan as well as add new small group opportunities.

Individual – Worship

For the worship category, this is where our church had a lot of strengths discussed in the small groups. The ideas in this category focus on making the most of the strengths and supporting some of the other ideas for other categories.

Training: For worship, there are already training plans for ushers and communion. The team needs to evaluate if other training is needed for liturgists or worship enhancement.

Scheduling: Every effort should be made to schedule as far in advance to enable the teams to plan around them. This will be key for scheduling with the Christmas Pageant and Cantata.

Communication: For the Worship team, communication is built in to how we work today.

Music Diversity: Our music program was listed by every small group as one of our strengths. This should continue to be a part of our worship plan. Some thought should be given to whether we can expand our music offering for community outreach either through making the community aware or maybe offering additional performances at times other than worship.

Visuals: The Worship Enhancement team was also received many comments as to its strengths. This should also be a part of our continuing efforts.

Drama: There were several comments that we have used drama in the past for worship. The team should explore whether there are additional opportunities to use this tool more often.

Engage Younger People: In addition to getting more involvement, we need to explore how to get younger members more involved and engaged. We need to see what is available and determine how best to let them know of these opportunities.

Outreach – Community

The Community category for outreach is how we make the neighboring communities aware of what we have to offer. During the time of the New Beginnings program, we have seen a lot of growth in this area due to the Community Outreach team. As stated in the Congregation Leadership section, the first idea is that this team needs to change its focus to cover communications inside and outside of the church family. Here are some ideas for this category:

Training: We need to explore what avenues we are using now for communications and come up with a cohesive communication plan. We need to develop a process/policy for other teams to get their plans and news out to the congregation and the communities.

Scheduling: Work with the other teams to make sure that communication timing needs are added into their schedules to ensure proper communication coverage.

Communication: This new Communications team should develop the communication plan and monitor it to determine if adjustments need to be made to make it more effective over time.

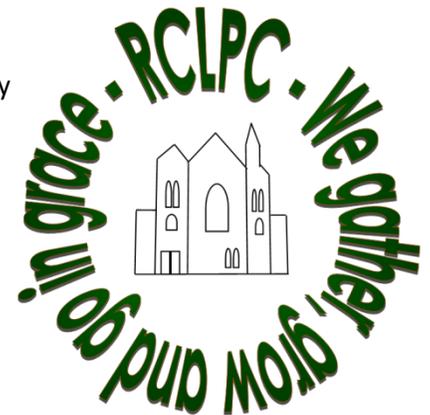
Increase Awareness: As we try out new ideas, this new Communications team can work to develop new methods for getting the information out to the community. One idea was to explore leveraging community events like Blast at the Beach, parades, and other community festivals. Also looking at ways to track effectiveness of these methods will be useful.

Building Utilization: As part of the other team's work to expand the utilization of the building, a plan will need to be worked out as to determine how to promote the building to our communities and overcome the secluded location.

Communications Coordinator: Having a single point of contact for communications was an idea that was discussed. This team needs to determine whether one is needed as they develop a communication policy.

Guests Welcome Plan: As other teams work on ideas to make visitors (guests) feel more welcome, this may require tasks from this team to carry out.

New Program Promotion: As other teams come up with new ideas, they may require assistance from the Communication team to promote new ideas. There will also be promotion needs from the Visioning team as we move into this next phase. We also believe that we need to look at a T-shirt design for members to wear as we work in our community and participate in community events. A rough design came out of our discussion, but working with some of the more artistic in our congregation may result in better ideas or at least better artwork.



Outreach – Mission

During the small group discussions, the feedback on mission programs was mixed and diverse. In some respects, it could be a matter of communicating better to make sure the programs are understood. Here are some ideas from the small groups.

Increase “Hands On”: There was a feeling that we need to increase mission opportunities where the congregation members could actually work in our communities. There was also a feeling that we had many opportunities that met those criteria. The Mission team needs to evaluate what mission work is in place and determine if there is a way to make it clearer how much “hands on” opportunities there are or look to see if there might be additional opportunities.

Evaluate Mission Valuation: There were also concerns about the mission projects we sponsor and whether the money is being used well when given and also how well they are managed. We need to look at what we directly support as well as those that are not part of the Mission budget. Regardless of whether the mission is directly budgeted or not, it is all seen as being sponsored by the church.

Number of Mission Initiatives: This was another topic that received a mix of feedback. Some felt we had too many and were spread too thin, others felt we should explore new opportunities; other felt that politics should not be part of mission and others felt we were fine the way we are. We need to evaluate the number of missions and determine the best number of those to support. This needs to include those from Presbytery.

Mission Evaluation Criteria: The three previous points all led to a single conclusion. We need to develop a plan to evaluate mission projects and then compare current projects against those criteria. This will enable future planning for next year.

Recommendation Summary

These sections have a lot of ideas spread between the leadership teams. For reference, here is the completed chart:

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Fellowship	Leadership	Education	Worship	Community	Mission
Training, Scheduling & Communication					
Small Groups	Clarify Roles	Small Groups	Music Diversity	Increase Awareness	Increase "Hands On"
Building Utilization	Building Utilization	Youth Leadership	Visuals	Building Utilization	Evaluate mission valuation
New Member Welcome and Involvement	Communication Coordinator	Youth Group Participation	Drama	Communication Coordinator	Evaluate the number of missions
Visitor Welcome Plan	Engage Younger People	Curriculum	Engage Younger People	Visitor Welcome Plan	Mission Evaluation Criteria
"Care" Initiatives				New Program Promotion	

The Visioning Team and the Future

As we were discussing the recommendations for the other teams and working on this report, one question was what happens next. We wanted to make sure we addressed this question up front to avoid the appearance that this report would be completed and thrown on a shelf. Our recommendation involves a plan for New Beginnings, a plan for tracking and communication as well as a plan for the Visioning team.

Future of New Beginnings

Given that this completes the New Beginnings program, the team feels that New Beginnings should cease to be a program title moving forward. We believe that we should have a new title for this next phase. We suggest “Working toward Our Vision” as the name of the new program. It could be preceded with the logo used for the T-shirts for communication purposes.



Working toward Our Vision

The intention isn't to create a new team. The Visioning Team would continue to be the committee responsible for tracking the progress of the program. This would just be a way to keep a consistent communication message.

A Plan for Tracking and Communication

To make sure this report doesn't sit on the shelf, we recommend that the Vision team continue to meet quarterly to evaluate where we are with these ideas, continue to work on some of the longer term ideas or those that we need more progress on some of these shorter term ideas to see what will really be needed. This team will provide a report to session as well as update for the Spirit to keep the congregation up-to-date.

We also believe that each team needs to make sure that as they work on ideas and communicate about them that we make a point to tie this to this project. The congregation will see it more frequently and it won't be lost. For example, if there is another small group opportunity or mission program; it could be introduced indicated that this is a part of the Working toward our Vision program for Fellowship or Mission.

The Visioning Team

As stated above, we believe that the New Beginnings leaders should be released from their charge at the adoption of this report. We also recommend the following course of action.

May 23, 2016 – This report is presented to session for their consideration.

June 27, 2016 – The session can vote on this report.

July – A Joint Elder/Deacon meeting can be planned and held to share this with the Deacons and work on some ideas and train.

July – The report will be delivered to the committees by the Visioning team to explain what sections pertain to those teams and answer questions and provide information. This will ensure a clear hand off of the recommendations as well as a good explanation of how we see tying progress to this program. The teams need to have a shift in how they approach the committee work to make sure new initiatives tie to one of our foundation points – Congregation (Gather), Individual (Grow) or Outreach (Go).

We believe that the core Visioning team should continue to meet quarterly along with anyone else who chooses to continue from the New Beginnings leaders or other interested parties.

There were some ideas that were too large or required a lot of capital or weren't well defined and need further study like a van, store front location, preschool, etc. These ideas will be need further research and thought.

There were also a lot of thought provoking research material that were found during our search. We believe that some of these ideas merit further research, prayer and discussion. These included articles about the network church concept, leadership material from the conference and other articles about faith in our time. It may also lead to small group opportunities for congregation members to have thoughtful discussions. It may also provide an opportunity for members of the congregation to explore their faith.

Conclusion

Despite the issues we had with the program, we were in agreement that the process was worth the frustration and lengthy discussions. We are also in agreement that the ideas in the report will not be completed overnight. As a leadership team, we have a lot to work on moving forward. The key is to not let this work sit on a shelf, but to let the largest take away from this be that we can't let fear of change or fear of failure keep us from trying new ideas to help us work on what God is calling us to do. We also need to realize that what we are called to do will change overtime to adapt to current needs.

In addition to the shift in thinking about vision planning being an ongoing process, we also have a shift in thinking about new programs and ideas. We are adding new criteria for looking at those ideas. We are going to start asking how the new ideas fit into our foundation. We will be looking at whether ideas will move us toward our future story.

This report has been a collaborative effort from the Visioning team, New Beginnings Leadership team and others. The core team members have included: Al Popp, Andrea Pracht, Chris Pickett, Cindy Theobald, Darryl Bessant, Fred Neuschel, Jac Kelewae, Janet Kvam-Holub, Kathy Rabe, Kayleigh Jensen, Lee Ekstrom, Lou Rabe, Pam Palmer and Steve Connell. We are grateful for this opportunity to work on this initiative and thank you for your attention.