

Report on Discerning God's will for

Clay United Methodist Church

Submitted on 2/8/2009

From "Chloe's People"

To

Administrative Council and Congregation of Clay United Methodist Church

(All scripture references contained in this report are taken from the New International Version of the Bible)

FINAL REPORT TO THE CONGREGATION

Introduction

As graciously submitted by the Caleb Team, we also humbly submit this report as an offering to God, firmly recognizing that any good ideas represented are God's and any errors are our own. As in all things, our desire is that, Jesus Christ be worshipped as Lord and Savior, through the recommendations and proposals described herein.

We acknowledge and thank God for the work of the Caleb Team that provided a wonderful foundation for Chloe's People. It was a blessing to have this strong foundation and clear affirmation that the Caleb Report was Biblically grounded and clearly a message from God.

The name for Chloe's People was taken from the New Testament story in 1 Corinthians 1:10-11.

“I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you...”

Chloe was a woman who Paul may have known well and she let Paul know of the quarreling and dissension among the Corinthians. Chloe's People was not chartered due to quarreling or dissension within the church, but because of the recommendation of Paul after hearing of Chloe's report “that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

Chloe's People

Kendra Ciszczon - Leader	Pat Stewart
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Myshelle Babcoke	Julie Deahl
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Why now?

Through the Caleb Team and God's call to Clay Church, we have heard and recognized that "7 acres can't contain the vision God has given us." The blessing of a beautiful new building on an incredible parcel of land has now been realized. God has led the entire congregation during the expansion and transition, and the laser focus of the new building provided a platform for all of God's people at Clay to engage in a time of spiritual transformation and growth.

After the completion of the new facility, a period of celebration and rest, we have transitioned to a two-site ministry. This period also allowed us to reflect on the accomplishments of God through the entire construction effort. This period of reflection and celebration was critical to the health of the congregation, and now we hear God's voice challenging us once again. Even though we were led to expand to a two-site ministry, many were feeling a sense that God had additional plans for Clay, and that the new building was only the first step in the realization of God's next call for our entire congregation.

Chloe's People was chartered to listen for God's next call for Clay Church. Specifically, the Chloe's People team was brought together to "unite in the same mind" to pray, study, and listen for how God would speak to us regarding the following questions:

- How is God calling Clay Church to change the world?
- What does God care about that Clay Church needs to care about?
- What does God want us to notice now – not about ourselves – but about God's world that needs the attention of God's people?
- What are the crying needs that we can and should do something about for our local and global community?

The questions above were developed in response to concerns articulated by the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church at the 2008 General Conference. They asked all churches of the denomination to consider:

- Who are we trying to reach now?
- How can we inspire new leadership for this century?
- What are the crying needs in our community and world that we are compelled to engage?
- What can we do to eradicate disease that especially afflicts the under-resourced of the world?

What does this mean? Why does this matter?

Chloe's People was chartered not to replace the Caleb Team or their report, but to let God move us to the next calling for Clay Church. This report serves as a supporting document to the Caleb foundation. It is our hope and prayer that when reading the Chloe's People report that the reader will take time to also read and review the Caleb report, which provided the foundation and launching point for God's next plan for Clay Church. We believe the Chloe's Report is the next step of the vision of the Caleb Report. For convenience, the Defining beliefs, Strategic Focus, and Strategic Pillars from the Caleb Report, which Chloe's People fully support throughout this writing, are listed below.

- A. We affirm the fundamental and defining beliefs of the Caleb Report:
 - 1. We acknowledge that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.
 - 2. We affirm that prayer and Bible study are the indispensable guides for our church and our lives.
 - 3. We are called to enact the vision God has given to Clay.
 - 4. We are called to achieve the mission God has given to Clay.

- B. Our Strategic Focus remains "Caring with a purpose."
 - 1. We invest in individuals.
 - 2. We build relationships.
 - 3. We are open and accepting.
 - 4. We seek a richer, deeper faith for everyone.
 - 5. We empower each other to care.
 - 6. We want to make a difference for Christ in the world.

- C. The Strategic pillars are the foundation upon which this new focus is built (including all age-levels: children, youth, adults):
 - 1. Building Christian Community
 - 2. Relevant Worship
 - 3. Everyday Discipleship
 - 4. Equipping Ministries

These beliefs, strategies, and pillars are the essential means of inspiring new leadership and workers to reach out beyond the walls of our congregation. Clay has a rich heritage of outreach and evangelism, developing leaders and missionaries who put their trust in the promises of God, and who are sold out to God's will. Some have gone on from our congregation into full time ministry and mission for the Church, whether within the walls of our congregation, in the greater South Bend community, or to the ends of the earth, trusting God to provide all their needs. The sign we read as we exited from the Clay South parking lot, "You are now entering the mission field," was a great reminder of our calling.

While the Caleb Report called to serve “the northern part of the greater South Bend area, including the areas in Granger,” the Chloe’s report expands that focus in the tradition of Acts 1:8 which reads: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” We believe it is time to expand our witness beyond the geographical boundaries of the Caleb Report.

As a reminder, the Caleb Team was established “to develop short and long range plans for *growing* Clay UMC.” Members of Caleb believed that God was calling Clay to “change things,” to become the “movement” that God intended. Chloe continues with the strategic focus of Caleb: “Caring with a purpose. People matter to us. We focus on people, one at a time.” The Caleb Report also asserts that “...we invest in individuals, build personal relationships, and stand resolutely opposed to the worldly divisions that seek to separate people...by creating an environment in which people are nurtured, supported, encouraged, challenged, and held accountable...empowering each other to care.” Caleb describes how Clay is “committed to helping each person find and fulfill the caring ministry that God has called them to,” remaining “open and vigilant to the possibility that God will lead us to minister to new populations.”

We believe twenty-seven acres cannot contain the vision God has given us, and that God is challenging us to look beyond our parcels of land to engage the wider community in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. From our first meeting to our last, we believe that God led us to support the entire Caleb vision and shape a new bold focus for the congregation. **This bold focus is to move Clay to become an externally focused church.**

It is apparent that the congregation of Clay church has a rich heritage of externally focused ministries. Through many activities of Chloe’s People, we were very encouraged and humbled by the number of individuals engaged in our community and outside of the traditional walls of our buildings. This bold focus is not meant to minimize the already engaged members of Clay, but to provide a new focus for the entire congregation toward making a Kingdom impact on our community – bringing the message and love of Jesus Christ to everyone.

Some of the outstanding, externally focused ministries of Clay include (but are not limited to):

Clay UMC Area:

Food Pantry
Early Childhood Programs
Firehouse
FaithWorks!
Bridges

Greater South Bend / St. Joseph

County:

Harrison Partnership
Hope Ministries
Community Emergency Fund
Sidewalk Sunday School families

Samaria
earth
be witnesses
will ends
my
all you Jerusalem
to Judea

Africa:

John and Kendra Enright, Kafakumba Pastors Training School
Zambia, Africa

Issac and Emma Lappia, Mondema Methodist Church
Sierra Leone, Africa

Dr. Cam Gongwer, Ankase Hospital
Ghana, Africa

Network of well-drillers
Burkina Faso, Africa

Latin America:

Steve and Hope Shearouse, Mission on the Move, Honduras and Mexico

Knowing that it is impossible to out give and outwork God, we have an incredible opportunity to focus on adding hands and feet to the awesome work already being accomplished both locally and around the world through the effort of Clay members, and ultimately through God.

We believe that the new building, the discipleship path “Connect, Grow, & Share” and the mission of “Living In Faith Every Day” have all helped prepare Clay to hear, accept, and move toward God’s next plan for Clay. God has poured out many blessings onto Clay: 1) The privilege of preaching and studying God’s Word without fear of persecution. 2) Passionate and dedicated pastoral leaders. 3) The gifts and talents of each and every member. All of this has equipped the entire congregation to be ready for the message that Chloe’s People have heard:

“Clay is being called to become an externally focused church to walk with more people toward a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ by Living In Faith Every day.”

The Process

Chloe’s People had their first meeting on August 4th 2008 and it began with the reading of Proverbs 3:5-6.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Each Monday evening Chloe’s People would gather, pray, discuss scripture, and listen for God, discerning where God was leading us. Although we had a facilitator, many members of Chloe’s People were asked to facilitate several discussions. We devoured *The Externally Focused Church* text that provided some direction to our discussion. We told stories of our current external focus through the ministries of Clay, like Sidewalk Sunday School and the support for South Bend Schools through the Harrison Partnership. We also heard about ministries by members of Clay that were unknown to any of us which included jail ministries, support for Hope Ministries, and Habitat for Humanity. These stories were deeply moving and provided support to the message that we were hearing - **to move fully toward becoming an externally focused church.**

Guiding scriptures

Matthew 28:19 – “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”

Micah 6:8 – “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

The Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) and Micah 6:8 were two of the fundamental and overarching scriptures/principles that permeated our discussions and guided our thoughts, prayers and discernment regarding our ministry. These two scriptures link evangelism to service. We believe Micah 6:8 is the means by which God is calling us to accomplish Matthew 28:19, reaching and walking with more people toward a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. We will gain access, influence, and opportunity within our community in a way that we would not otherwise have, through serving others. We feel that God is calling Clay to “act justly...love mercy...walk humbly” with God as a way to grow God’s Kingdom for God’s glory.

We were led to ask community leaders about the crying needs of South Bend and St. Joseph County. We learned of countless areas of need in many different locations in our community. We listened for both opportunity and for God’s direction. Chloe’s People originally thought we were being called to a specific ministry on which the entire congregation would focus. Instead, God brought to our attention various community ministries in which many of our members were already engaged. Trying to focus on just one came to feel as though we were wrestling with God. We thank God for opening our hearts and minds to hear God’s desire that we understand and support many community needs, not just a limited few. **We felt God prompting us to get to know our already engaged members, to recognize that each of us will feel called to different ministries, and to allow the entire congregation to appreciate the experience and gifts that Clay has to offer in talent, time, and treasure.**

In one of the most powerful meetings of Chloe’s People we spent the entire time in prayer. Because we had not achieved complete “[unity] in mind and judgment” we felt a need for focused prayer. We listened for God and asked for direction regarding what we had heard throughout the course of four months. This tremendously spiritual experience allowed us all to abandon our individual wants, desires, and ideas about what we thought we had been hearing. This time of focused prayer allowed God to move through all of the members of Chloe in such a way that it affirmed that all of the information in this report was of like mind, and was the message from God.

The Simple Church

In their book, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*, authors Tom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger describe the “simple church” model of operation. This approach has four distinct characteristics: clarity, movement, alignment and focus. The definition of each is quoted in a bullet format below:

- **Clarity** - the singleness of purpose, stated in a single phrase
- **Movement** - removing congestion that stifles spiritual development
- **Alignment** – maximizing the energy of everyone
- **Focus** – saying “no” to everything that distracts us from our purpose

The Caleb Team outlined a vision that was easy to digest, highlighted the Kingdom mission of God, and aligned the entire church to a mission bigger than itself – “7 acres can not contain the vision God has given us.” It is the intention of Chloe’s People, through this report, to advance the mission of Jesus Christ through a simple calling that we have heard – that Clay must become an externally focused church. This does not mean that we should delay or change all of our existing ministries. **This means that we should have laser-like vision throughout the entire congregation on making an impact on our local and global community.**

Jesus was the master at making the complex simple. Our home lives and our church work can become complex and involved. Meeting after meeting and commitment after commitment can sometimes make us wonder if we are really doing what God put us in South Bend to do. We believe the message God has given us is simple and is a natural outgrowth of being on the discipleship path. We know God is challenging all of us at Clay to take the Discipleship Path of CONNECT, GROW & SHARE seriously. We can connect and grow as personal responses to what God is doing in our lives, but until we share, we are not doing the world changing business to which God has called us. God may be changing us, but until we **SHARE, externally**, this will have little impact on the crying needs of the world.

We believe this new “simple” church message from God should become the measuring stick for our ministries and our activities. This should bring clarity, alignment, movement, and focus to all that we do, to ensure that the Word of God is moving through us to others beyond the walls of our church facilities. This aligns perfectly with the entire L.I.F.E (Living In Faith Every day) mission and the Connect, Grow, & Share Discipleship Path already well underway at Clay.

Where are we now? The need for self-assessment

During the many months of meeting, discussion, and asking God for direction, it was clear that there were two overwhelming questions being asked: “How is your soul today?” and “How impactful are our existing ministries today?” It is important to take the right amount of time to evaluate, from a congregational standpoint, these important questions as we turn to the next chapter in God’s plan for Clay

Church. Moving from a building cycle to a new simple church message of becoming externally focused, will be a huge transition. It is vitally important that we all understand how we are growing spiritually and how we are ministering to the needs of our community.

We had many discussions that focused on surveying the entire congregation. We considered what sort of inquiry would be useful. We developed some good questions but also considered that a professional instrument could be helpful. We felt it important to utilize an instrument or methodology that would give Clay the tools it needs to launch this expanded external focus. It is the recommendation of Chloe's People to engage in a two-part survey process outlined below:

1. EVALUATE HOW WE ARE CURRENTLY GROWING SPIRITUALLY ON THE DISCIPLESHIP PATH

We might, for instance, utilize a tool such as the "REVEAL Congregational Growth Conversation" survey that hundreds of churches around the country have completed. This tool would assist us as we GROW on the discipleship path. This is a very mature well-tested congregational assessment that addresses the following questions throughout a given timeframe:

Who Attends Your Church?

Why Do They Attend?

Where Are They on Their Spiritual Journey?

What Are They Doing to Grow Spiritually?

What Are Their Barriers to Spiritual Growth?

2. EVALUATE HOW WE ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN EXTERNAL MINISTRIES

We suggest a ministry assessment, which could be called ENGAGE. The ENGAGE survey would assist us in the SHARING of our discipleship path. This tool would need to be developed by an internal team at Clay, chartered by the Pastors team, and should at least address the following questions:

What corporate ministries do we engage in at Clay – a complete internal inventory?

How impactful are those ministries to the people they serve?

What is the potential of the ministry?

What is the implication to the ministry?

How effective are they in helping us accomplish our mission?

What ministries are our members involved in outside of Clay?

What ministries do our members care about locally, regionally, and globally?

Most importantly, these two evaluations would provide important information to help us move from GROWING to SHARING on our own discipleship path. We will have the information needed to understand, from a congregational standpoint, where we *all* are on our spiritual journey and how Clay can best address its ministries *both internally and externally* to reinforce the importance of walking with Christ.

Next Steps

Through the discernment activity, as stated earlier in this report, we focused our attention on several key objectives. **Overwhelmingly we believe that the Lord, our God and Savior, has charged this congregation to continue to “care with a purpose” as we become an externally focused church to walk with more people toward a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ by Living In Faith Everyday.** These key objectives are outlined as four strategic next steps that we submit as the direction and challenge that our Lord has laid before Clay.

Next Step 1

Mark 9:40 – “Whoever is not against us is for us.”

We are called to create strategic partnerships at home and abroad to impact our world with the love of God.

Intent and background

We do not feel led to reinvent ministries, outreach events, and missions where existing services are effective. Gaining recognition for Clay Church is not our goal; we want to be a witness for Christ in the world. Our concern is God’s mission and therefore we should be open to partnership with existing ministries and service organizations locally and around the world to ensure that we are the most impactful and effective followers of Christ we can be. There is no need to reinvent the wheel and “the movement” has everything to gain by leveraging existing and effective ministries to fulfill our mission.

Scriptural relevance and what this means for Clay Church

It is clear that there are already many organizations providing important services, meeting the needs of the poor and marginalized in our community. This is a blessing in that we don’t have to spend precious Kingdom resources to create an infrastructure that already exists. However, it is also clear that these same organizations are in need of resources, including caring volunteers. In the current economic climate, there are record numbers of families that are unable to meet their most basic needs, such as provision for food, clothing, shelter and medical care. ***This is a tremendous opportunity to let God’s light shine through us by serving these families.***

With respect to partnerships, there are many examples in the Bible where God’s will is accomplished using secular governments, infrastructure, and resources. Probably the most familiar example would be Joseph accomplishing God’s purpose of preserving the Hebrew people in the midst of a terrible famine

with Pharaoh's resources (Genesis 41:41-43). ***Clay Church should form partnerships with secular organizations that are doing good things for people. These partnerships should revolve around a common love for and commitment to our community.***

We feel Clay is being called to partner with other churches and service organizations as a way of connecting servants with persons in need. Chapters 10 and 11 in the book of Acts detail how God instructed Peter (a Jew) and Cornelius (a Gentile) to join together for a new cause and purpose, despite their history of cultural separation. Speaking to a group of Gentiles assembled by Cornelius (an officer in the Roman army), Peter said

“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.”

We admire Cornelius and Peter, that though culturally different, they worked together on a common calling. ***In partnering with other organizations, we want to be just as faithful and obedient to God's call. We are full of hope, certain that God will do great things in this community through the people of this community!***

The Sweet Spot

Authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, in their book *The Externally Focused Church*, describe a concept they call the “sweet spot.” It is the area where “the needs and dreams of the community, the calling and capacity of the local church, and the mandates and desires of God” overlap. They go on to argue that “**service**” is that “**sweet spot**” - “something the community needs, God desires, and the church has the capacity to do.” ***It is out of serving and meeting the needs of others, that relationships develop and opportunities to share the love of Christ arise.***

Organizations such as the Robinson Community Learning Center, The Sister Maura Brannick Health Center, the Juvenile Justice Center, the County Jail, Catholic Charities, Hope Ministries, the Kroc Center and the South Bend Community School Corporation are just some of the places God led us to explore. As we began to try to narrow our focus from “What can we do?” to “What should we do?” and “With whom should we partner?”, it became clear that we would need to undergo some type of self-assessment, evaluating our own strengths, capacities, and challenges first. Specific partnerships and undertakings will reflect the specific gifts, strengths, passions, callings and experiences of our congregation, as well as pastoral guidance and prayerful discernment.

Serving to bless (not to control or judge), when partnering with other organizations is our goal. We hope that Clay will be plugged into the community in such a way that excitement will permeate the church. We envision a day when a wide array of opportunities to serve will be easily accessible. For that to happen, we will need a well-led system of volunteer deployment that runs like a well-oiled machine. It will give structure and accountability to our ministries. It will guide us through a healthy church partnership from “hello” to “farewell.” We will partner with organizations designed to relieve suffering and transform lives. We, ourselves, will be transformed in this process!

Next Step 2

Acts 6:2 – “It would not be right to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.”

We are called to develop leaders for new emerging ministries at all age levels.

Intent and background

Clay is blessed to have a tremendous outpouring of support through many dedicated members who lead many ministries both publicly and quietly. It is clear that in moving to the next chapter of God’s plan for our church, new leaders will need to step forward and be trained, at all age levels, to ensure that God’s plan can be realized.

Without new leaders, at all age levels, we run the risk of overburdening our existing leadership teams and weakening our already existing ministries, making the goals that God has set before us more difficult to attain. This builds on the Caleb pillar “Equipping Ministries”, by the intentional development of mission leadership. New leadership does not mean replacing the existing leadership. This is a step to *augment* both lay and clergy leadership in all areas of ministry at Clay to ensure we have capable leadership to allow God’s plan to go forward.

Scriptural relevance and what this means for Clay Church

Mark 10:42-45 – “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,...For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

2 Samuel 22:36 – “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him...It is God who arms me with strength...he enables me... He trains my hands...you stoop down to make me great.”

2 Timothy 2:2 – “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable [people] who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 3:16 – “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the [people] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

We do not believe God has called us to become an externally focused church with the same number of people leading the same number of ministries. ***God is calling us to ensure that we build a church that is focused on the crying needs of the world.*** We cannot do this without helping to expand missions and leadership here at home, while staying grounded in the Word. Acts 6:2 is a phenomenal example of the twelve disciples realizing that while there was more work to do, it was important to continue to build up leaders that could spread God’s message.

“It would not be right to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables

(Acts 6:2).”

New Leaders - New Ministries

Developing new leaders will allow us to minister to the community in new and exciting ways. Through our time of discernment and study of the *Externally Focused Church*, we began to ***understand ministry as simply meeting another’s needs with the resources God has given you.*** Regardless of where one is on the discipleship path, everybody can meet someone else’s needs with the resources God has given him or her.

Each member of Clay Church has a personal passion, a passion that can be translated into an opportunity to reach, to help, to “minister” to somebody else. Our passions or professions are as varied as the members of our congregation, but we feel each member should use their passion in partnership with God to change the world. When we plug into our personal passion, we are energized to step forward – turning our passion into action.

Spreading the Word

To do this, Clay must intentionally develop leaders across all generations, from *FaithWorks!* forward. In particular, we need to focus on new young adult leaders. As an example of developing new leadership, Timothy, who Paul calls a true child in faith due to his young age, was responsible for overseeing the church in Ephesus. This was a tremendous responsibility for anyone and Paul entrusted a younger generation to guide and teach older ones.

“Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1Timothy 4:11-12).”

Time after time, God calls a younger generation to advance the mission. Through Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, David, Timothy and others, God spoke and they listened. This is not to discount God’s calling and the service of other generations, but there is a significant gap for the younger adult population in the Church today.

Generation Y, born between 1974 and 1996, is an incredible source of talent and optimism. They are three times as big as Generation X, totaling close to 60 million, and they are highly underrepresented in churches today, including Clay. This group falls into the gap between leaving the church after graduating from **firehouse** and returning to the church when it is time to start a family.

Understanding the needs of this energetic population can enable world-changing activities to be carried on through future generations. Generation Y is “socially conscious, spiritual, and family centric.” Additionally, this generation “enjoys working with the baby boom generation in a mentoring fashion and for advice.” (Results Project YE: *Engaging Today’s Young Employees – Strategies for the Millennials*, The Concours Institute, May 2007) **This generation, unlike previous generations, has the potential, if realized, to align perfectly with God’s next challenge for Clay.** We must embrace their enthusiasm and seize this opportunity, trusting as Paul did with Timothy, that these young people can be incredible leaders for Jesus Christ! Given Clay’s multi-generational congregation, we have the people and the life experiences to deliberately develop this next generation of leaders, leaders not just for today’s missions but for the future of our church.

We feel called to partner with new young leadership and to provide what we can to be helpful: mentoring, equipping, to prepare them to serve. We also know it is important to listen and learn from young leaders, as well.

Next Step 3

Ephesians 3:14-19 – “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

We are called to reach and include a younger adult population with the gospel of Christ.

Intent and background

As Caleb stated in their third pillar, youth ministries should “serve as a major mechanism for community outreach and evangelism.” Clay has phenomenal programs that serve a very diverse group of youth. Through FaithWorks!, the Early Childhood Program, VBS, Sidewalk Sunday School, Cub Scouts and other programs, we are reaching young children within and outside of Clay Church and this should be celebrated. **firehouse** Youth Ministry continues to provide a platform for connecting, growing, and sharing the love of Christ. Programs such as the Refinery (Bible study) hour, **firehouse** Worship service, periodic retreats and outreach events (such as Wednesday-Night-Live), international missions (such as in Tapachula, Mexico) and the drama program (including the musical mission tour) are just some of the exciting ways Clay is reaching and serving youth.

As the Caleb team referenced, “research indicates that people who are not Christians by age 18 have less than a 10% probability of accepting Christ in their adult years.” We will continue to embrace and nurture youth, as well as look for ways they can participate in serving our community alongside us. However, we also should direct significant attention and resources toward reaching younger adults (18-30 yrs. old) who may or may not have grown up in the church. Whichever the case, these young people are conspicuously sparse in many congregations around the country.

When we reviewed the ministries that Clay has for younger populations, we realized that there is a very large gap, and thus an opportunity, to reach and include the 18-30 year old generation. ***We feel it is vital to the health of the church to act on this knowledge and respond to this challenge.*** Clay must continue to understand how we can reach and include young adults who are new to the workforce, new to marriage, and newly “on their own.”

We know we must not be a hindrance. Young adults often perceive the church as being judgmental, legalistic, exclusive and unkind. Many like the idea of the love of Jesus but they don’t care much for the church (Dan Kimball’s *They Love Jesus, Not the Church*).

Understanding and addressing the needs of this energetic population could be pivotal in making a difference for Christ in the world. This generation is “socially conscious, spiritual and family centric.” (Results Project YE: *Engaging Today’s Young Employees – Strategies for the Millennials*, The Concours

Institute, May 2007). Such characteristics would conceivably draw them to service opportunities or to churches with a prominent external focus. Engaging at the FaithWorks! and **firehouse** age levels is critical, but engaging 18-30 year-olds can and will add a tremendous source of energy and enthusiasm to our expanded outreach focus. Currently, the young adult “gap” is a huge ministry opportunity for us. Many of these young people have a Christian heritage, but have dropped out.

Throughout all the next steps in this report, we want to provide special focus on young adults (18-30 yrs. old) who have incredible gifts and energy to contribute to this externally focused plan from God.

Next Step 4

Matthew 25:35 – “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

We are called to address the needs of the under-resourced in our local and global community.

Intent and background

Clay UMC is a very connected church community with members who are involved in many different community initiatives and ministries. We believe it is God’s call, through his message in Matthew 25:35, to specifically focus on, engage, and address the needs of the under-resourced in our community. Marginalized people in society are easily overlooked. *We feel called to organize and expand on the many ways Clay is already serving the poor in our community.*

Scriptural relevance and what this means for Clay Church

Matthew 7:24-27 – “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

James 1:22 – “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

James 2:17 – “Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action is dead.”

Proverbs 31:8-9 – “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor.”

Isaiah 58:6-9 – “Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

Who are our neighbors? How the Parable of the Good Samaritan can inform our lives:

Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan and how Jesus directs us to act toward our neighbors. Luke 10:25-37 gives an account of a time when an expert in the law set about to test Jesus, asking what one must do to inherit eternal life. As was typical of Jesus, he answered the man’s question with another

question, asking “What is written in the Law?...How do you read it?” The man cited the two greatest commandments:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Wanting to “justify himself” (v. 29), the man asked Jesus to define “neighbor.” In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus clearly defines a “neighbor” as anyone in need or distress. Like the good Samaritan, we, who are just every-day-ordinary-people, can choose to have a tremendous impact for Christ through serving our “neighbors”—those in need who live in the neighborhoods around Clay, live in the many local communities of Michiana, and live throughout the global communities of the world.

People are in need of our mercy

In his gospel, Matthew, himself a tax collector, describes a time when he invited Jesus to share dinner with him and many of his friends. When the Pharisees questioned why Jesus would associate with “sinners and tax collectors,” Jesus simply responded with

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’ (Matthew 9:12-13).”

We noticed that Jesus links service with evangelism. In John 14:12, Jesus assures us when he says, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Acts 5:12 also paints a picture of evangelism through service: “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people...were highly regarded by the people...more and more men and women were (saved).”

In his response to the question posed by the Pharisees, Jesus also refers to a time of God’s disapproval of the actions, or inactions, of God’s people. Jesus is referencing the Old Testament scripture from Hosea 6:4-6 which reads:

“...What can I do with you Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore...my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment ... rather than burnt offerings.”

One could paraphrase it this way: “I desire your time, your support, your energy, your thoughts, your prayers, your service - rather than the offerings you bring to the altar.” ***God wants our acknowledgment in the form of kind, generous, and merciful behavior towards our “neighbors,” those in need.***

In their book, *The Externally Focused Church*, co-authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, write that “Mercy is God’s attitude and action towards those in need or distress.” It goes beyond pity and compassion. ***Mercy is compassion moved into action!*** The authors emphasize that “externally focused churches that are salt and light for their communities have strong scriptural convictions regarding their ministry outside the walls of the church.”

We believe God is calling Clay to think of Jesus’ words “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” – for us to move our compassion into action right now! It is essential to this calling that Clay organize and expand on the

work being done individually and corporately by our members. This is why an internal evaluation of our outreach ministries is so important.

Demonstrating justice

Stemming directly from Micah 6:8, our reading of *The Externally Focused Church*, and prayerful discernment, we feel that Clay is being challenged to do even more than extend “mercy” to the under-resourced (like giving a person bread to alleviate hunger). Beyond that, we are called to demonstrate “justice” by teaching that same person how to cultivate wheat and make bread. “Justice” finds and heals the causes of problems instead of just treating symptoms. Jesus performed many miracles, healing many debilitating illnesses that resulted in the empowerment of the people healed from those illnesses for a life time. He brought people from dependence on, and a constant need for mercy from others, to sufficiency.

We believe God is calling Clay to help the under-resourced obtain the skills and relationships necessary to move out of poverty – social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual poverty. We believe this outward focus is not only necessary for the growth of the Kingdom of God, but that it is also necessary for our personal spiritual growth.

In the spirit of Micah 6:8, we will partner with God will bring healing to the local and global community through Jesus by acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God! This is part of the transforming relationship to which God is calling us and for which we need to trust God and be accountable!

Overcoming challenges

We are challenged by God’s promise in Isaiah 65:1 (and Romans 10:20), “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’”

To this, we say to God, “Here we are!”

This new message should also harness the power of the FaithWorks! and **firehouse** ministries, as we look to broaden our external focus. God blesses those hands with incredible power, energy, and faith. Many times, we fail to see what these children and youth see clearly. Just as Jesus drew upon the resources of a little boy to provide a meal for more than five thousand people (John 6:1-13), our children are perhaps untapped resources for both ideas and inspiration.

Jesus does not ask for a lot – just for us to have faith enough to contribute what we have (just “five small barley loaves and two small fish”) and trust God to do the rest. We are inspired by this example of how Jesus comes down from a high and lofty place to meet us where we are, insufficient, inadequate and broken - and how then, through our faith in God who makes wonderful things happen!

Strategic Movement – That was a lot of information – NOW WHAT?

The information contained within this report was put together through many months of prayer and discernment and contains many items. It is important to outline, in a succinct way, what God is calling us to do next. The following information is meant to highlight what is already contained in the previous sections of this report.

What: Introduce God’s message through the Chloe’s People report

Why: We understand that just publishing the report, and sharing this new plan does not create alignment. We know there is much prayer and work ahead to enact this focus.

What: Internal evaluation regarding how we are growing spiritually on the discipleship path

Why: To understand where we are on our spiritual journey and how we can ensure we are creating the most impactful environment for our expanded call from God.

What: Internal evaluation of how we are currently engaged in external ministries

Why: To understand our ministry inventory, how impactful those ministries are currently, and what impact those ministries could have in the future with God’s expanded plan for Clay is a critical next step.

What: Charter team to evaluate the survey results

Why: To give clarity-movement-alignment-focus for our external work ahead

What: Encourage existing Bible studies and the entire congregation to read and study *The Externally Focused Church*.

Why: We don’t need to recreate the wheel on many aspects related to becoming an externally focused church. Rusaw and Swanson have outlined, in a concise manner, some of the most important elements in moving further in the externally focused direction.

What: Adopt a simple church mantra: Clarity-Movement-Alignment-Focus allows us to do Christ’s work together.

Why: It should not take more than one conversation to help someone understand the external focus of the ministry of Clay Church and get connected in outreach ministries.

Conclusion

We believe that God has led us in the discoveries of this report. We offer this as a gift to the church and we pray it becomes plan for future ministries. We recognize that we don't have a step by step implementation plan. Each time we wrestled to put a plan in place it was clear God told us that our talented congregation and the leadership would develop this plan for an external focus. We trust the church's leadership (pastors, staff, and laity) to develop the people, resources, strategic plans, and an appropriate timetable to become externally focused in our ministry. God's message to us was not to focus on one external mission, one building project, or one partnership. God's message was a call to Clay church to have that laser focus on the external needs of the community and world and to combine the many passions of our Clay family to those external needs.

“Clay is being called to become an externally focused church to walk with more people toward a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ by Living In Faith Every day.”