

## Foundry's Neighbors

Planning helps make the future happen. On this premise Foundry has developed a planning process to enable the church to understand its congregation and context as it makes important decisions regarding the life of the church. Questions guiding the process are "Who as we?" "Who are our neighbors?" "What is God calling us to do and be?" and "How do we organize to be prepared to answer God's call?"

From September 2006-February 2007 a Neighbors Planning Study Group appointed by the Church Council gathered information toward answering the question "Who are our neighbors?" The primary vehicle included seven gatherings, five through open invitation to all Foundry members, one involving staff, and one involving youth, with total participation of nearly 100 people. In addition, the Planning Group was trained in and employed relational conversations to begin an ongoing process of building connections with community members. Finally, an analysis of the ministry in the area surrounding Foundry offered additional pertinent information. This report emerged from analysis of the gatherings with Foundry members and staff.. The Neighbors Planning Study Group studied the answers of Foundry constituents to the following questions:

- Please identify persons who fit into each group: those connected to Foundry, but with whom there is room for deeper relationships; those not connected to Foundry, but with whom you personally have a relationship; and those whom neither Foundry nor you are personally connected to, but to whom God might be calling us to reach out.
- Choose two or more of the neighbors from question 1 and describe unmet needs that they might have and whether Foundry might have a gift or develop a capacity to meet these needs.
- If you were to pick one neighbor for Foundry to seek a deeper relationship with, who would that be and why? Given Foundry's particular gifts, abilities, and passions, where might God be calling Foundry to reach out in new or deeper ways with our neighbors?

The analysis conducted by the Planning Group yielded eight categories of neighbors: the African American community; communities receiving services; faith communities and partners; Foundry's nearby neighbors; the gay community; the global community; neighbors within Foundry; and youth and schools. Each Planning Group member studied the responses through the lens of a different category of neighbors and wrote the synopses in pages 5-10 of this report. Finally the Group derived eight main points that emerge from this work as guiding principles for Foundry.

The Neighbors Planning Group offers these principles to be considered along with statements from the "Who are we?" Planning Study Group by leaders of the church at the 2007 Leadership Retreat, the Church Council, the next "Who is God calling us to do and be?" Planning Study Group, and the congregation continue to shape Foundry's future.

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## **Guiding Principles Regarding Foundry's Neighbors**

### **Neighbors Within**

**Foundry should welcome and be more actively engaged with individuals and groups who have limited connections within the church.**

### **Relationship with Foundry Neighborhood**

**Foundry should be more visible and interactive with people in Foundry's nearby neighborhood.**

### **Deepening Current Relationships**

**Foundry should deepen its existing relationships and expand the types of services currently being provided.**

### **Reciprocal Service Relationships**

**Foundry strongly supports being in relationship with people whom it serves: services should be face to face or built on direct relationships.**

### **Collaboration Opportunities**

**Foundry should join with effective existing groups to provide specific services when practical.**

### **Understanding Through Involvement**

**Foundry members want to deepen their understanding of the beliefs of others, both different types of Christian congregations and other faiths through joint involvement in service offering opportunity for dialogue.**

### **Prophetic Voice**

**Foundry should use its prophetic voice to encourage actions leading to social justice.**

### **Future Choices**

**Decisions about undertaking service projects should be based on documented need and the conviction and passions of groups within Foundry who are willing to provide leadership for the activities.**

### **Illustrative Examples for Guiding Principles**

These examples are derived from the many given by those who participated in congregational, staff, and youth gatherings. The synopses on pages (insert pages) provide further examples from the same source and explicit ways to meet the needs of the persons identified.

#### **Neighbors Within**

**Foundry should welcome and be more actively engaged with individuals and groups who have limited connections within the church.**

- Aging individuals with health conditions, lack of transportation, or lack of programs that meet their needs
- Newcomers who find no fellowship in Fellowship Hall
- Worship attendees who have no relationship to individuals or involvement in activities except in a Sunday morning service
- Members who used to be active but are no longer involved
- African American members and constituents

#### **Relationship with Foundry Neighborhood**

**Foundry should be more visible and interactive with people in Foundry's nearby neighborhood.**

- Homeless people on the streets of our immediate neighborhood
- School-age children in a local school who need help with reading
- Newcomers to the neighborhood, including singles newly on their own, families with young children, and young professionals
- Workers and business owners in the neighborhood
- Commuters who wait for buses in front of Foundry

#### **Deepening Current Relationships**

**Foundry should deepen its existing relationships and expand the types of services currently being provided.**

- Day laborers as a high priority for getting to know better and to serve in more ways

- Gay people who have been ostracized or driven out of other churches and who have had limited access to rituals and sacraments within the church
- Prisoners reentering society
- People who need worship services at alternative times
- Trans-generational groups to draw together youth and older people

### **Reciprocal Service Relationships**

**Foundry strongly supports being in relationship with people whom it serves: services should be face to face or built on direct relationships.**

- Survivors of Katrina
- People in poverty and homeless people served in Friday walk-in ministry
- Families served in Appalachia
- People served on VIM trips
- People across class lines

### **Collaboration Opportunities**

**Foundry should join with effective existing groups to provide specific services when practical.**

- WIN
- B-WARM and reconciling congregations
- Jewish Community Center
- La Clinica del Pueblo
- SOME
- Walker Whitman Clinic
- Emmaus

### **Understanding Through Involvement**

**Foundry members want to deepen their understanding of the beliefs of others, both different types of Christian congregations and other faiths, through joint involvement in service offering opportunity for dialogue.**

- Conservative, evangelical Christian churches
- Jewish communities
- Muslim communities
- Asbury United Methodist Church
- Grace Russian Church
- Churches nearby to Foundry

## **Prophetic Voice**

**Foundry should use its prophetic voice to encourage actions leading to social justice.**

- Reconciling movement within the United Methodist Church
- Policies and practices regarding immigrants
- Latin American human rights
- Action regarding Darfur
- Peace efforts

## **Syntheses Regarding Eight Communities Identified in Congregational Responses**

### **African American Community**

Seventeen people identified Asbury UMC and/or local African-Americans as neighbors with whom Foundry could develop deeper relationships. Of these responses, six people described in more detail why and how this could happen. A key theme of these responses was the desire to make Foundry a more welcoming and diverse congregation. This was similar to a common theme expressed throughout the listening sessions that Foundry should become a more welcoming place for newcomers. As one person put it, "How do we bridge the 'welcome mat' so that people of color feel safe?" The concern was also expressed that this applies to newcomers as well as African-Americans who already attend Foundry. A couple people suggested that this would include exploring different styles of worship, music, and preaching at Foundry. A second key theme was the desire to foster a relationship with Asbury UMC church, both because of its predominant African-American congregation and its historical relationship to Foundry. There was an acknowledgement that there have been past efforts to develop connections between the two congregations. However, responders suggested that additional efforts would "...increase the diversity experience of all the communities and help to promote exchanges between racial groups." One person pointed out that this relationship would help Foundry better understand its past, as well as lead it be more inclusive in the future.

### **Communities Receiving Services**

Foundry's proven track record in helping others through our mission work provides a solid platform in our efforts to deliver services to homeless people, day laborers, refugees, immigrant groups, prostitutes, and prisoners. Foundry's walk-in and day laborers missions must continue to assist with referrals to community services, obtaining legal identification, providing meals, clothing, legal advice, and ESL classes. Foundry can also expand our services by partnering with specific

community organizations such as La Clínica del Pueblo, N Street Village, SOME, and Whitman Walker Clinic. We can identify mutual causes and pool resources to address common goals and needs (i.e. overnight stays, serving meals, medical services, and assisting those attempting to re-enter the workforce by helping with interview and communication skills).

By strengthening Foundry's Prison Ministry we can connect children with separated parents (i.e. prisoners and immigrants), as well as reach out to marginalized groups including prostitutes. Foundry should also mobilize its social justice groups to educate our congregation about immigration issues, serve as advocates for a just immigration reform, and become a larger voice in the struggle for permanent shelter facilities. Foundry can increase its presence and expand our fellowship opportunities with immigrant communities by establishing an alternative time to open our church for Spanish speaking worshippers.

### **Faith Communities and Partners**

Foundry members show a strong desire to dialogue, engage, and deepen relationships with a myriad of communities of faith. The inquiry participants point to communities ranging from Christian to Jewish and Muslim congregations; from local churches to international partners; and from fellow reconciling congregations to conservative and evangelical churches. Our members' interest might be condensed to three basic levels of interaction: 1) dialogue; 2) service; and 3) deeper relationships (and, of course, some ideas bridge more than one of these categories).

At the top of the list was a desire to dialogue and to build bridges of understanding with those of other faiths (especially Jewish and Muslim communities). Running a close second, however, was the idea to reach out to those of our own faith: conservative evangelical Christians who have completely different interpretations of the Bible. Within the pages of responses, there is indeed a keen sense of reconciliation, of listening and learning. One member says the intent would not be to convince, but "to acknowledge and accept our differences." Another felt there was "a call to initiate dialogue with anti-gay Christians...this issue is so painful...and must be addressed by the church."

It is apparent Foundry members are called to service and outreach. An examination of people's thoughts on interaction with other faith communities reveals an enthusiastic interest in networking to a greater extent with the churches and faith communities in our own neighborhood. For the most part (except when the intent was building a deeper relationship as outlined below), the desire was to explore what we might do better in our community by pooling resources, learning from each other, and engaging in coalition groups like WIN and the Downtown Cluster of Congregations. Service also plays a part in Foundry respondent's seeing neighbors as those who are not necessarily located in our immediate geographical area. Participants cited involvement and service with faith communities in Nicaragua,

Africa, and the Holy Land. And, service also encompassed roles that Foundry is well-equipped to provide...a healing and safe place for those who have been “so hurt by the church,” a nurturing source of strength for other UMC congregations seeking to become reconciling.

Finally, Foundry participants desire to deepen relationships with faith communities – relationships we have already kindled. As one flips through the written notes of respondents, two things continually jump out: Grace Russian and Asbury UMC. There is a sense that these are commitments we have already made, but that need to be enhanced and nurtured. As I write this on the evening of MLK’s birthday and on the heels of an incredibly meaningful MLK Sunday at Foundry, I am particularly moved by one respondent’s words about Asbury UMC, “we are already committed to this project and I believe that it has the potential to be a precedent-setting (project) in the UMC church...with major implications for our life as a nation.” In addition to continuing to deepen relationships we have been bold enough to initiate, we might also build relationships with newer groups we engage through dialogue (conservative Christians, Jews, and Muslims). For example, are there joint service projects we might pursue with people of completely different faiths?

It is clear Foundry members are humble, yet bold people...people willing to take the lead, to wonder, and yet know we have much to learn from others. The important work of dialogue, service, and relationship-building is crucial to the future of Foundry, our community, and the world.

### **Foundry’s Nearby Neighbors**

Seven categories of neighbors who live and work near to Foundry’s building emerged in congregational gatherings: homeless people, school-age children, churches and social agencies, newcomers, day laborers and other immigrants, aging people, and workers.

(1) Many Foundry members want to serve needs of homeless people on the streets of our immediate neighborhood, part of a larger concern about the homeless. Suggestions included an everyday program, Bible studies, and referrals.

(2) School-age children in the neighborhood need help in reading and perhaps in before or after school programs. An overall concern with children and education included adopting one school in our immediate neighborhood for multiple forms of help, including working in libraries.

(3) Nearby churches and social service agencies are seen as partners, including in such activities as coordinated theater productions with the Jewish Community Center, mediated discussions with evangelical churches, more work on behalf of homeless people with First Baptist, and appreciation nights for churches and agencies doing good work in our area.

(4) Several people felt that Foundry has a lot to offer newcomers—whether mission opportunities, music, or fellowship—and these should be publicized to the local community. In addition, some mentioned that Foundry might be able to uniquely minister to those that have had poor experiences with more conservative or doctrinaire churches in the past. People moving into the neighborhood, including young professionals, families with children, and singles newly on their own could be served with such activities as welcome-to-the-neighborhood visits and welcome-to-Foundry activities, Improvement of Fellowship Hour for newcomers who do visit Foundry is essential. “Coffee hour is a disaster” was one of many castigations about Fellowship Hours after services.

(5) Expanding services to day laborers and other immigrants who may live or work in the area is a high priority. Our current efforts are seen as a positive start to what we could do.

(6) Many Foundry members are concerned with the aging in the immediate neighborhood: those who have trouble getting to church could use organized car pools or busing; those who are home bound could enjoy sermons and music recorded for the web and a visitation program.

(7) Workers in the neighborhood could benefit from noon lunch programming, alternative time worship services (called by one person “offschedule worship”), and midmorning or midafternoon break programming, such as exercise or storytelling.

### **Gay Community**

Foundry United Methodist Church is seen by some people as a prophetic voice for change and has become a leader in the denomination. Consequently, FUMC could partner with other UM churches in Greater DC as well as nationally, in mission work in order to model how a reconciling church can function optimally. FUMC could provide resources, data analysis and finances to help other UMCs become reconciling or move their congregations to higher levels. Since FUMC’s members are seen by some to be the church’s greatest strength, FUMC could host more seminars dealing with the UMC’s reconciling movement. In addition, FUMC could reach out more boldly to the DC gay/lesbian community who are spiritually disconnected and/or who have experienced spiritual violence. Publicity using advertisements and flyers could proclaim FUMC as a refuge. Furthermore, GLBT organizations and clubs could be allowed to use church space thus building a bridge between them and the church family. Lesbians, in particular, appear under represented at Foundry, so a woman speaker at GLBT retreats might create a more welcoming environment for them. Since the bishop wants FUMC to create “little” Foundries, the un-churched GLBT communities are ideal target groups for establishing new congregations.

## **Global Community**

Overall, participants expressed a strong connection to the larger global community and an expressed desire to be more active participants in serving these people as neighbors. Consistent comments echoed by the participants included sentiments like “our money is important, but we should be more forceful advocates” and “let’s stray from the traditional and impersonal version of service” to be in relationship with those we serve, whether in New Orleans, Latin American, in interfaith dialogue or Appalachia. This suggests that there is a yearning to have a personal connection to the conflicts we read about, and to make real neighbors of the masses we see on the news. There was also a strong desire to use our power and influence to change the political dynamic around the world among those that listed global concerns.

- Darfur: “I worry about Darfur and that someday we’ll be ashamed that...as a nation we didn’t do more.” We need to use our influence as well as give to meet their immediate needs in the camp. We need to provide financial assistance as well as apply political pressure to stop the genocide.
- People in poverty: we need to work with governments and organizations to meet the needs of the poor. We can give our time and money, but we need to be more engaged as a congregation and with other congregations. “It’s easy to feel marginalized if you are poor and everyone else appears to be well-off. We need to have the poor as equal partners to remind us to the humble”
- People who receive our charity: our money is important, but we should be more forceful advocates, provide more direct assistance and in-kind support.
- Katrina: “Let’s stray from the traditional and impersonal version of service (giving money and supplies, travel to do work) and go to New Orleans to talk, document people’s stories/needs and bring those stories back to our community.”
- Latin American human rights: provide basic supplies (like kits we’ve done for Darfur) and visibility. Identify or develop lay leaders to highlight issues in our congregation.
- Jerusalem/Holy Land/Palestine: Build relations so that we can provide a forum to tell the stories that don’t make it through the news. Increase the understanding of Palestinian Christians. We can facilitate interfaith dialogue here in Washington with the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. We can work together on mutual issues, such as day laborers, homelessness, elderly from a scriptural basis.
- ASP/Appalachia: Do we go back to families we have served? How do we continue those special bonds and relations?

## **Neighbors within Foundry**

The working definition of Foundry neighbors was based on the assumption that our neighbors do not include people who are in some way connected with the Foundry congregation. The reason for making this distinction was to try to keep separate

those future plans that might address the needs and talents of current and former members, attendees, and visitors and those that address the needs and talents of those with little or no Foundry connection. However, participants in discussion sessions showed substantial interest in using the discussions of neighbors to raise concerns about groups within the church whose status can be categorized as somewhere between active members of the current congregation and neighbors with little relationship to the church.

Four such groups of people are the following:

- people who have a limited relationship with Foundry but do not have strong ties to the Foundry community. They are in our midst but are not a part of Foundry. These people include visitors, non-members who attend but have not joined, persons who are involved in our mission programs but don't attend worship services, persons whose connection to the church's life involves only attendance at worship, and persons such as receptionists and janitors who are on the staff;
- aging individuals within Foundry who have limited their participation in church activities because of health conditions, lack of transportation, or current programs that no longer meet their needs because of their age;
- persons whose needs are not met by Foundry's current programs and groups; and
- persons who were active members in the past who no longer are actively involved. Some have moved out of the Washington area; others still live here.

Limited relationship and weak ties: The following suggestions were made for ways to strengthen ties to the Foundry community: identify visitors or irregular attendees with name tags or designate persons to seek out people after services or during coffee hours and help them feel more welcome; follow up on the weekly sign-in sheets and have a group of members who contact people directly and try to get them involved in activities. Coffee hours were identified as opportunities for friends to visit and that they were not welcoming occasions for people who knew no one in the church. Some discussion participants stated that they had volunteered for various activities and had never been called and been asked to help.

Aging individuals: Many suggestions addressed ways to accommodate the changed circumstances of aging individuals. For example, find ways to help people with transportation problems get to worship services and other activities through organized car pools and pick-up services; provide Foundry activities at residential facilities such as Asbury Village and Riderwood for resident Foundry members who have physical or transportation challenges; organize programs and worship services of special interest or a 65 plus group for people of a certain age.

People with unmet needs: Groups of people whose needs are not being met by the church's current programs included those who are over 50 or 60, recently married couples and new parents, youth who want a greater connection with the rest of the

congregation, and persons within the congregation who lack emotional and family support systems.

Former attendees: Suggestions revolved around improving and customizing communications so that former attendees can remain informed about individuals and activities within the church and around designating special services as times to welcome back former or inactive members.

### **Youth and Schools**

Foundry United Methodist Church has the capacity to provide assistance to schools in the District. People within the church family could be trained to tutor, not only FUMC children, but also beginning and struggling readers in elementary schools and at-risk older students in middle and high schools. Parishioners could also assist in school libraries and cafeterias. FUMC could select one District public school and provide volunteers to assist students with homework, provide summer programs, and renovate the building as needed. School supplies could be provided if a shortage exists among underprivileged students. Gang prevention programs in DC could be identified and implemented or supported. FUMC could provide adult fellowship to young people who need big brothers/sisters relationship one-on-one or small groups (following the First Presbyterian model). Mentoring of students with physical, social, and/or emotional needs is a possibility. Special worship services could be provided on Saturday evening or Sunday afternoon designed specifically for neighborhood youth. Washington Interfaith Network may be a channel for seeing many of these suggestions achieved. Lastly, FUMC should create more trans-generational groups within the church family led by ministers and/or trained laity with the specific purposes of ensuring social, educational, and spiritual growth.