

Foundry United Methodist Church Planning Study Group Report

Context for the Planning Study Group

During 2005 several events and necessities pointed to the need for Foundry to consider and plan its future. A Leaders' Retreat, a financial necessity, a staffing change, and congregational concerns all led to a Foundry self-study as a next step for that planning.

At the annual Leaders Retreat in early 2005, Foundry's leaders focused on the future of Foundry by looking at its present and at three questions posed by Gil Rendle, an Alban Institute consultant helping in the process. Those three questions--"Who are we?" "Who are our neighbors?" and "What is God calling us to be and do?"-- became central in ensuing activities.

When the Finance Committee asked SPRC to lower the church budget, a Study Committee constituted for that purpose met often and probed deeply in examining how to cut expenses while still enabling the church to carry forward its mission and programs. On the basis of a subsequent SPRC recommendation, the Church Council made the difficult decision to eliminate one appointed staff position. At the same time, SPRC advised the Church Council that it could not make future decisions regarding staffing without answers to questions about Foundry's members and mission.

Congregational responses regarding staffing were expressed at two Holy Conversations in Spring 2005. At one Conversation, Foundry members lamented the loss of a beloved staff person and identified some areas that they felt needed attention, including nurture and communication. At the second Conversation, members reviewed a proposed shift in responsibilities among the current staff and the proposed addition of a part-time Minister of Discipleship, partly to respond to their expressed needs during the first conversation. On both occasions, members appreciated the opportunity for receiving information from church leaders and for having a say in decision making at Foundry.

In order to continue the process of answering the three key questions that can help Foundry decide on future staffing, lay involvement, and programming, the OCC met with Gil Rendle to learn from his expertise possible ways to proceed. Rendle suggested that because Foundry is drawing new members, it might look at its last 100 members or so to determine their demographics and what attracts them to Foundry. Both quantitative and qualitative data are important in this self-study.

Rendle outlined the features of the technique of Appreciative Inquiry, which focuses on high points of experience. Appreciative Inquiry follows the Biblical admonition in Philippians 4:8 "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is

commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Exchanging stories about what values make Foundry members who they are and what brings them to and engages them in the mission of Foundry can yield qualitative data available for other teams that will do future planning and decision making.

The OCC then appointed a Planning Study Group with the charge to collect data about members in order to have information for a subsequent group that will lead Foundry into the next steps of its planning process. The Planning Study Group decided to solicit quantitative information from church staff and to generate qualitative information from a series of Appreciative Inquiry sessions with church members, both new and longer-term in order to understand what attracts members to Foundry both initially and over time. To help with the Appreciative Inquiry process, the group members read *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* by Mark Lau Branson and *Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry sessions: dates and format

Five 1 ½ hour sessions were held on Saturday, January 7; Sunday, January 8; Wednesday, January 11; Saturday, January 14; and Sunday, January 22. Each session included (1) an introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, (2) modeling of response exchange, (3) exchange between two participants of responses to four questions (When have you experienced the most life-affirming and energizing aspects of Foundry? How do you use your talents and gifts in a life-affirming way at Foundry? When have you been most aware of how Foundry shows God’s life-affirming love, mercy, and justice in the community and in the world? and Building on what you have said about life-affirming experiences at Foundry, what would you like to be a part of in the future at Foundry?), (4) sharing among 6-8 participants of one important story told by a partner, and (5) identification by Study Group members staffing each table and by all participants of emergent topics and themes.

Participant information

138 members and constituents participated in Appreciative Inquiry sessions. They included:

- 66 new members (from the last 200 people who have joined Foundry)
73 longer-term members

- 72 women
67 men

- age distribution

under 30: 13	50-59: 31
30-39: 24	60-69: 28
40-49: 29	70+ : 14

Planning Group analysis process

The Study Planning Group integrated the five sets of themes and topics identified in the large group discussions with topics and themes they identified from reading all of the forms from the sessions. The group then identified overarching themes, listing each response that provided evidence for the theme.

The individual response forms were then read by a different member of the Planning Group so that every form was read twice during the process. Individual responses were again listed under themes. During subsequent analysis redundant themes were merged. A set of ten core statements that were solidly supported by evidence were adopted as outcomes from the process.

Core statements from the Appreciative Inquiry process

1. Members act publicly and proactively regarding critical, controversial issues.
2. New people feel embraced and welcomed at Foundry.
3. Members find that ceremonies, rituals, retreats, and special events provide occasions for caring and building connections.
4. Members value that Foundry affirms that all people are equal in the eyes of God.
5. Members own the care of one another.
6. Through provocative sermons and sustained study and reflection, members are inspired and challenged to engage difficult and complex topics.
7. Members experience God through personal relationships, intentionally building connections to become neighbors and communities.
8. Members value the unexpected, including alternatives to pre-conceived notions about the church and the world.

9. Members value taking personal actions and supporting the actions of others that make a difference for real people.

10. (Sunday morning) Worship is pivotal in the lives of Foundry members.

This report is submitted by the Planning Study Group: Barbara Cambridge, Chris Collins, Carolyn Eustace, Paige Eustace, Dave Kidwell-Slak, Sam Kirkpatrick, Dean Snyder, Sarah Stiles (chair), and Steve Telkins.

Time Line for Planning Study Group

August 2005	Group meets to decide on process for meeting its charge. Staff provides initial demographic data. Planning Group requests more and different cuts on the data.
Fall 2005	On Laity Sunday, three newer members trace their own initial attraction to Foundry and their paths to involvement.
Inquiry.	Study Group members decide on and study Appreciative Inquiry. Church Council approves Appreciate Inquiry process. It debates and then approves funding for consultancy services.
December 2005	Study Group members make calls to 200 newest members. Records are kept on spreadsheet to assure coverage. Study group invites member participation through messages in the <i>Forge</i> and <i>Focus</i> , table in Fellowship Hall after church each Sunday, inserts in the <i>Focus</i> , flyers at the church office, signup at Church Council meeting, and phone calls to longer-term members.
January 2006	Five 1 ½ hour Appreciative Inquiry sessions are held on different days at different times to accommodate members' schedules. Foundry ministerial staff participates in an Appreciative Inquiry session to experience the process and share their stories.

Storyboards about the purpose, assumptions, process, Biblical basis, and session format of Appreciative Inquiry are displayed in Laws Gallery.

Study group devises analysis strategies and meets regularly to work on analysis.

Study group reports to OCC and to Church Council about progress of the sessions.

February 2006

Study group meets weekly to do analysis in order to derive core descriptive statements.

Study group prepares for and reports at the Leaders' Retreat.

March 2006

Study group makes final report to Church Council.