

Gaining Traction

Six months ago, I began my journey on staff at the United Methodist Foundation. There is no question that churches are finding themselves paralyzed in this denominational environment and they are longing for traction. For years the standard practice was to lead churches through a long and involved discovery and visioning processes. This process worked well and helped many churches find vision and direction.

However, now we are living in a heightened climate of uncertainty. This climate is shaking our churches to the core. With this in mind, I began revising and shortening my visioning process. With churches seeing some familiar faces returning and some seeing new faces, a unique opportunity is presenting itself. In this new environment lay and clergy leaders are longing for engagement. I am currently working with several churches that have entered this new visioning process with renewed sense of purpose as they enter the new year.



The new visioning process was boiled down into two phases. First, leaders are asked to determine their values that capture their uniqueness. Most values are too generic or are redundant because they restate doctrine or church strategy. Values are not what they do, but characterize everything they do. Knowing who they are and what makes them unique in their values is key in this uncertain environment. The next step for the leaders is doing a deep dive into these four key statements: ***Where have we been? Where are we now? Where We're Headed & How We'll Get There.*** Once the leadership has spent a significant amount of time answering these powerful statements the church is ready to boil down "How they will get there" into one or two key goals for the year. It's exciting to see the hope this process can generate and how quickly a church can gain traction in making disciples for Jesus Christ!

Another area I have focused on is birthing small cohorts. Last year I partnered with Rev. Melanie Carey to launch a leadership cohort. We lead monthly discussions based on the book *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed in the Crucible of Change* by Tod Bolsinger. One of the hardest challenges pastors face is leading through change and it is best not to go it alone.

This year I am partnering with Rev. Brad Kalajainen to launch two preaching cohorts in January. Brad Kalajainen was the founding and lead pastor of Cornerstone UMC in Grand Rapids for 25 years before retiring in 2021. The cohort will be digging into the components of good preaching, preparation, evaluation, worship, team building and more. Later in January I will be adding one more leadership cohort. Pastors are longing for these types of experiences for their relational value and to give them that extra edge to get traction in their ministries.

If you would like to talk visioning or be part of a cohort, please reach out. Let's talk!

For more information about visioning or being part of a cohort, contact Rev. Gary Step, Senior Director of Leadership Development.