

HCI Consult Report

**Hamline Church, St. Paul, MN**

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Healthy Church Initiative Report

Minnesota Conference of the United Methodist Church

*Respectfully Submitted by:*

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*The Minnesota Conference HCI Team would like to thank Pastor Mariah Furness Tollgaard and the leadership of Hamline Church for your hospitality this weekend and for the privilege of teaming with you. Our prayer is that God will use this process to focus and maximize the potential of your congregation for fruitfulness for Christ.*

The Healthy Church Initiative has named five key factors to a congregation’s effectiveness and vitality. The consultation team used these as a lens to assess what they heard, and to make their recommendations. These factors are:

* Purpose: a clear sense of why this church exists, what they want to accomplish, a genuine outward focus and grounded in a clear set of shared values.
* Structure: staff accountable and empowered to fulfill their responsibilities in the context of healthy relationships with lay leadership, a future oriented church board focused on the ends not the means of ministry.
* Connectedness: a high level of community in which people feel connected and newcomers can easily find their way in, excellent facilities that work well to facilitate ministry.
* Current: music that, regardless of style, is current in its execution, relevant biblical preaching, clear understanding of the community and its needs
* Passion: a genuine excitement about the church and strong desire to invite others, sense of call to serve the community.

We reviewed the congregational self-study, the report of the mystery guest visitors, and the results of the Natural Church Development inventory. We conducted individual interviews with the pastor, paid staff and key leaders. We held two focus groups: one was a cross section of the congregation, and another was the church council members. We also received input during a congregational gathering in which about 50 people attended. We were present to observe Sunday morning worship and we engaged the leaders in a feedback session about our observations and recommendations before finalizing them in this report.

General Observations

Hamline Church is a mystical paradox. It is a tall steeple church located in a heart of a neighborhood. It is a recent merger of two churches each with a distinct history and traditions. They name themselves as a new Christian community which worships in a gothic sanctuary. The predecessor Hamline Methodist Episcopal Church was birthed and located in response to the presence of Hamline University, and yet, while there is proximity and connection, this is not a University church. This is a community that can feel ancient and mysterious (the sanctuary), hip and new (Thirsty Scholars), vintage (the dining hall) and dated (the bathrooms, the fellowship hall) all at the same time. What is constant and seems to hold everything together is the commitment to be a spiritually inclusive, intellectually inquisitive, and socially progressive community. And whatever else, it is an incredibly resilient congregation, having weathered significant change and turmoil the past few years, and coming out on the other side positive, engaged, hope-filled, and seeking to extend itself out into the community.

*Hamline Church embodies numerous resources and strengths ideally suited for next-level transformational ministry, as well as some concerns that need to be addressed in order for the church to move forward.*

Strengths

1. Positive Momentum And Energy

We asked about the mood of the congregation in our interviews. Consistently the response was positive, relieved, the most dynamic and functional it has been in years. Many described the time following the merger as chaotic and difficult. There was a revolving door of leadership, morale suffered as well as the quality of ministry and financial health of the congregation. But in the past 18 months, through the strong leadership of Pastor Mariah Tollgaard and a talented and dedicated staff, there is renewed energy and confidence about the future of the church. Many new people have started attending post-merger, and they are bringing fresh ideas and enthusiasm.

1. Unique Location and Building

It is not every congregation that has such an architecturally impressive sanctuary with a glorious pipe organ. It is not every congregation that is located in the heart of the city, adjacent to a University with a shared history and values, and in the midst of eclectic neighborhood that is on the verge of transformation. We believe those are assets, and gives this congregation significant opportunities for ministry.

1. Relational Community Ministries

The bread oven. The Dining Hall. The SPROUT Community Garden. These were named over and over again as signature ministries of the congregation. Each of these are connections to the community and places where community is built in the congregation. It is intriguing that they all have to do with food, and in some way, they are all about connecting people with something that is a very old practice: the community bread oven where we actually bake bread from scratch; planting a garden and sharing our harvest, and offering people comfort food and a meal at a table in a fast food world.

1. Music and the Arts

People value the diversity and quality of music offered in Sunday worship. To have the capacity and ability to span musical genres from Bach to Leonard Cohen and weave them in a way that creates powerful worship is distinctive and allows the congregation to live out its desire to be an intergenerational community. We do note that the Mystery Guests rated the music performance as very strong, and 80% of them described it as traditional and would most appeal to people 45 and older. Building on both the quality and continuing to expand the variety of the music offered will be a key asset in reaching new, younger and more diverse people. One expression of this commitment is the Music and Arts Series the congregation launched this past year that moves music beyond worship as a way to bless and connect to the community, and was rich in its diversity.

1. Creative Constructive Communication

Fresh, current, high quality communications are the norm in this congregation. We particularly noted a user friendly, updated website and strong social media presence through the Facebook page. The visual graphics are done well, and printed materials look clean, crisp and professional. We would also commend the commitment to regular town hall meetings as a way to create dialogue and engagement with the wider congregation.

Concerns

1. Lack of a Clear Identity and Compelling Vision

This congregation will greatly benefit by clarifying its unique vision and purpose. We can see remnants of the culture and identity of the previous congregations but not a unifying vision of who this congregation is now and what God is calling them to do and be in this community. All the paradoxes named in the opening paragraph make this an even greater concern. It is a noisy world out there and to be able to break through the clamor and all the other competing voices, the church needs to have a message that is clear, consistent and compelling. “This is who we are. This is what we are about. This is why who we are and what we do matters and why being a partner with us in ministry, or joining this community could be one of the best decisions you will ever make.” Clearly, God is doing a new thing at Hamline Church. We see it in the new ministries like the bread oven and SPROUT garden that not only meet a community need but speak to the unique soul of this congregation. Giving greater language and voice to the shared vision and values will propel every area of the church forward.

1. More Martha Than Mary in Its Spiritual Life

This is a congregation that is great in doing, and seeks to live out the John Wesley mandate to do all the good they can. They want to be a good neighbor. They care about the world. They are willing to show up, pitch in and help. What is not as prevalent are the spiritual practices and well from which the doing good comes from. The congregation scored itself low in passionate spirituality and its scores in passion for devotions and connecting their faith to their daily life were at 0. Without a passionate spirituality, what distinguishes us from a social service agency or a civic organization? We are the church. We are here to offer Christ.

1. Too Comfortable and Somewhat Closed

The downside of the positive momentum and energy is that people are scared of risking that for whatever might be next. Things feel good right now, and people are concerned that too much change, or the wrong change, might create turmoil that jeopardizes this positive path that they are currently on. We heard more than once that people like the size of the church and were resistant to growing significantly larger. The report of the Mystery Guests were mixed. Some felt welcomed by the congregations others felt isolated. One comment that captured the overall sentiment: *The vibe felt good after church, but people had their little groups of who they were talking to. I was a little disappointed in the ending.*  Also, we noted considerable attachment to the current form of worship by the congregation, and not always aware how that might be preventing them from reaching new people as exemplified in this comment: *the physical church is stunningly beautiful. The minister seems very sincere and insightful. I would consider returning but I would prefer a church that has a more lively style of worship. More variety of music might help.*

1. A Need for Intentional systems

In a mid-size church, it is important to offer consistent experiences, and to effectively connect people into the community and to Christ, to help them grow in their faith and to develop them as spiritual leaders. That requires systems. So every Sunday radical hospitality is executed well. Every person is helped to take the next step in their faith journey. People are not simply recruited to a task but there is a process for raising up and deploying spiritually formed leaders. The Mystery Guest report tells us that radical hospitality is inconsistent. The NCD scores suggest that intentional faith formation is not occurring for adults, and the congregation while scoring high in empowering leadership stated several times that leaders are burning out and there is not a process for developing new leaders.

1. A Diffusion of Energy and Resources

Because there is not a clear direction and purpose, every idea is a good idea. There is not criteria to know whether a direction should be pursued or not. There is a not a disciplined process of asking to “to what end?” are we doing this ministry, and is it helping us accomplish our mission? So, for example, there is a proportionally large amount of money directed towards the music ministry in relation to other ministries. There is a huge time investment in the dining hall that pretty much captures the congregation attention and energy for three weeks in late August and early September. Tending to the building consumes a large amount of financial and staff resources. Clarifying the congregation’s vision and direction will allow you to evaluate if these are the best uses of your time and resources and how you can best leverage all your assets for ministry and the future. From our perspective, it seemed like the congregation was doing a lot of things, and not necessarily aiming their passion, gifts, staff and resources in a focused way.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Claim a Larger Vision to Be a Sanctuary For the City

In many ways, the building defines the church, and we believe the congregation’s presence and ministry needs to be as big as the building. If you visit old European cities, what you notice is at the center is a plaza and a church, and that is the gathering place of the community. It is where the weekend market is held, where people gather at the sidewalk café’s, and where community celebrations occur. It is where the community comes together to connect, to talk about life and make sense of what is going on in the world, to be fed, and to participate in something that adds beauty and joy to their life. What if Hamline Church became that kind of church for the city of St. Paul?

But more than just a church, or gathering place, what if Hamline Church was a true sanctuary when people could slow down, take some deep breaths, connect to what is ancient and true, and discover a community that helps them build strong lives of meaning, purpose and joy. This is where the multiple worlds in which we live: work, family, neighborhood, and world: eternal and temporal, global and particular, all meet, and we find a way to live life that is authentic, empowered and hope-filled.

So what could “Sanctuary for the City” look like?

* Become a community gathering place with the whole property becoming the plaza for the neighborhood. A patio/garden around the bread oven? Partner with the University to create green space for gathering. Host community events on the property where the community can gather and connect.
* Host conversations that the community cares about, and people are trying to make sense of. Be the bridge builder in the community. Continue to build on the Art of Neighboring sermon series with a commitment to practice and teach so that St. Paul is really a city of great neighborhoods.
* Be the event center for the community. The important celebrations, feasts and festivals are held here. They aren’t rental events. It is what we do. We open our doors and host the community when it gathers. Even more, we provide the hospitality of greeters so that every time people step across our threshold they experience the grace of being welcomed into community.
* Can this be the place where people discover that food and fellowship are sacramental and this is community that is authentic and original, ancient and new and that this community has character and depth? To do that, Hamline Church will need to ground all that they do into an invitational, contemporary way of offering Christ. With grace, we invite people to take the next step into the community so that they can find their place at the table and offer their gifts of love and service.

1. Dare to Be a Destination Church: Get Simple and Excellent

This church has the potential to be a regional church for the city of St. Paul. It is the only United Methodist Church within the city of limits of St. Paul that currently has that capacity. You have a great missional opportunity to be a church of impact. However, to be a destination church in which people are willing to choose you, you need to focus on and execute in all of these four areas at an exceptional level week in and week out.

* **Bright, bold, dynamic worship, executed excellently every week is ingredient one.** People have expectations of worship when they walk into a tall steeple, gothic structure church. We have to meet those expectations and exceed them and surprise people with how we fuse the ancient and the new to create something that feels full of mystery and heart and soul all at the same time. We would recommend that you schedule a consultation with Marcia McFee (marciamcfee.com), a nationally known United Methodist worship consultant. She can help you enhance what you are doing well and look at how you can make worship more experiential and engaging. In your consultation, work with Dr. McFee to creatively address these items that we observed:
  + Sightlines: if one sits more than a few rows back, they cannot see anything that is not front and center and at the top of the steps including the children’s time and musical numbers not performed by the choir. When one cannot see, they are less engaged.
  + Congregational singing: It is challenging to follow and sing strongly given the large space and no specific song leader leading out. Again, it dissipates the energy in worship when the singing is stilted because people can’t hear one another and sing in one voice.
  + Flexibility: the chancel area is fixed and relatively cramped, and with such beautiful space, it would be interesting to consider how one might get more versatile use out of the various spaces in the sanctuary.
  + Visual Enhancements: how can worship incorporate more visual elements other than the spoken and sung word to connect to people in multiple mediums?
  + Worship planning: to creatively and intentionally design worship collaboratively as worship staff and leaders, and to do it seasonally and far enough in advance so there is adequate time to implement effectively.
* **Be known for quality children and youth ministries.** Our children’s ministries need to be cutting edge if we are a destination church. Families have a clear understanding of what their children are learning in Sunday school and kids want to be here. Our youth ministry is designed in such a way that youth stay engaged and invite their friends because what we do is something they can’t get anywhere else. And above all else, this family ministry bonds children and youth into the body of Christ and grounds and grows them in their identity as a child of God. To make this shift we encourage you to:
  + Create great spaces that kids would be excited to be in. Visit some churches (particularly the larger mega-churches) and look at their children and youth ministry space and how they are designed to say, “church is for you!”
  + Move the nursery upstairs. Parents today want their children close by and visual access.
  + Have professional check in procedures for the nursery and children’s ministry.
  + Implement Faith Stepping Stones ([www.faithink.com](http://www.faithink.com)) which is a way to bless, call, and gift parents by integrating families into faith formation, and connecting the congregation’s baptismal promises to life-long spiritual growth.
* **Make Music and the Arts your public presence and what you are known for.** Continue and deepen on what you are doing with the Music and Arts series.
  + Evaluate this first year of the Music and Arts series to determine the right number and kind of offerings for future years that will help you reach the most people. Think of these as “front door” events to the church: better communications, always a ministry leader present welcoming guests, always a “next step” that leads into the worship life of the church.
  + Consider a rotating arts exhibit, and how art/color/design can be strategically enhanced around the church that moves the beauty of the sanctuary into the rest of the church.
* **Ensure that the whole building is beautiful, up to date and works.** There is no hint of 1950, and hodgepodge furniture. Common spaces and the bathrooms are most important to a person’s experience of a place. Remember, everything communicates so walk through the building with fresh eyes, and think about clean, uncluttered, and visually pleasing. Stop in front of every picture, every display, go through every room and ask “what message is this sending about who we are and what we about?” Introduce classic colors and décor for everything beyond the sanctuary so the building feels like a more cohesive whole. “Green buildings” matter to people, and it is a sign our commitment to good stewardship and creation care. Keep working on steps you have taken, and set yourself apart by being a historical building that is cutting edge in its environmental sustainability.

1. Feed the Soul

Invite and form people around cultivating a spirituality of the inward and outward journey. This would be rhythm of worship and community, connecting faith and life and truly grounding people in a way of life that is true enough, deep enough and strong enough to sustain them for all of their life.

* People are shaped by worship that is deeply Wesleyan. As a church, not only do we want to offer bright, bold and dynamic worship every week, but we also want to be immersing ourselves, as community and individuals, into a Wesleyan discipleship that holds together personal holiness (loving God with heart, mind, soul and strength) and social holiness (loving our neighbor). Worship is bedrock of what we do and who we are as the body of Christ, and therefore, you want to create a culture where you expect people to be in worship unless they are sick or out of town, because it is so formational to their identity as Christians, and without it, they have a hard time remembering who they are gifted and called to be.
* People commit to a community group where their faith is explored and expressed. They live lives of spirituality, service and social justice in and through these groups. Create an intentional framework of community groups by:
  + Creating an overall concept of community groups that would encompass current small groups and ministry teams. Each group would be a community group that has components of spirituality and service. Some might have more of an emphasis on service, others more on spirituality.
  + Design the groups so that new ones start at regular intervals so new people can connect easily. *Activate* by Nelson Searcy offers a simple structure for starting new groups. Minnetonka UMC has implemented that model with good success and would be a resource for you.
  + Equip leaders to be spiritual leaders of the group, responsible not only for organizational needs, but the formation of the group and the spiritual growth of the people within the group.
* Create some conversational gathering spaces in the church for community groups to meet. Perhaps half of the fireside/community room could have nice sitting areas with comfy chairs and couches. Ditto for the parlor with a conference table.

1. Strengthen the Body

The church is more than a collection of people and activities. It is the body of Christ. How we live and work together is as important as what we do together. Hamline Church needs to focus what they do, and strengthen how they do it if they are to become a Sanctuary for the City that really has impact. We would invite you to take the follow steps:

* Conduct a resource audit of where all the time, energy and resources of the paid and unpaid leaders are invested, as well as the financial commitments of the congregation, and given the path laid out in the first three recommendations, determine a staffing and resource plan to accomplish that direction.
* At the same time, conduct a ministry audit of all current ministries as to whether they are inward or outward focused, and how many are focused on discipleship and evangelism and how many are focused on fellowship and fundraising. Evaluate the efficacy of each ministry towards its intended goals and determine which ministries should be continued and enhanced and which might need to be gracefully concluded or refocused to accomplish the vision laid out in the first three recommendations.
* We commend the single board governance. A next step is develop the members of the board and the ministry team leaders into spiritual leaders. A simple way to begin: commit to 20 minutes of prayer and bible study and 20 minutes of leadership development (read a book, do a case study) at each meeting. Ensure that decision making is grounded in spiritual discernment. A recommended first book to read together: *Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose, Presence and Power* by Graham Standish.
* Build into the board and ministry teams the responsibility for developing new leaders. Move away from finding people to fill slots and do jobs to a holistic approach of developing leaders. The focus become on investing in people so that they grow into their God-given giftedness and allowing leaders to discover the joy that comes when they have made a difference in another person’s life. The heart of discipleship is to invite others to come and see, to learn and grow, to love and lead.
  + Determine what are “first serve” opportunities and connect new people there within a few months of their participation in the church. Hospitality and one time service events can often be those places.
  + Offer on a regular basis workshops where people can discover their gifts and passions. *Life Keys* is a comprehensive resource that goes beyond spiritual gifts inventories.
  + Develop a mindset of apprenticeship. Everyone who is leading in an area in the church should be thinking about who they can invite to come along side, who they can mentor and develop as a spiritual leader.
  + Staff need to model leadership development after Jesus and identify who are the 3, 12 and 70 they are investing in and developing as spiritual leaders. Build into staff meetings talking about who are on their leadership development list and how they are developing them as spiritual leaders.

1. Make a Path to the Church and a Clear Pathway Into Community

To be a destination church, people need to know the church is here and what we are doing. And once here, we need to offer clear, intentional steps into community where people can encounter Christ, grow in their faith, discover their gifts and be empowered for service and justice. *Get Their Name* by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan is a helpful resource and we recommend that the coach and team read that together and develop a robust plan considering the following elements:

* Developing a branding statement/tagline that defines who you are, and lets people know that you are a destination worth checking out. This needs to be short and powerful. We recommend contracting with a branding expert to help with this.
* Create a regional marketing strategy. Direct mail still works, so consider a strategy of mailing to households in a 5 mile radius a nice postcard three times a year (fall, Christmas and Easter) and do it consistently year after year. Also give your people invite cards to hand out for each new sermon series. Continue your good work with social media, and encourage folks to like and repost on their timelines.
* Have invites from every event to the next event, follow up with people after every event.
* Connect what happens at the dining hall to who you are as a church. Do you give coupons for a free loaf of bread or an invite to the next pizza party at the dining hall?
* Triple the hospitality that happens on Sunday morning. Place greeters at outside doors front and back, even better stand outside and open doors for people. Have another set of greeters at the sanctuary doors. Improve exterior signage and building entrance information. Develop a team of people who have the gift of welcome to be the roving connectors on Sunday morning who look for new people to welcome them and connect them to someone else. Mark some parking spots as reserved for first time guests. Have coffee available upstairs in the common areas before worship begins, and make sure there is a spoken invitation at the end of worship to coffee downstairs afterwards. Create a welcome desk, and staff it every week and offer a gift (perhaps a loaf of bread) to new people. All of this may mean a future expansion to create a larger gathering space in the commons area, with perhaps a new entrance out to the bread oven, so connecting the indoor and outdoor gathering spaces.
* Offer monthly gatherings for new people so they can get connected, meet the pastor and take the next step.

Conclusion

We offer a vision of what this church can be. A Sanctuary for the City, where the community connects and is shaped and formed. A church that is a destination where people come for unique and lively worship, strong children and youth ministry and to find a sanctuary for their soul through music, the arts, and grace-filled community where spirituality, service and social justice are woven into the fabric of life. That this church is on the cutting edge of making what can seem ancient and out of step, fresh and new and relevant once again. This church is as the Celtics described, a thin place, where the bread is baked, blessed and broken and whether it is shared at the communion table or as pizza around the bread oven, it is sacramental, because all of life is holy, and here all experience a community that supports that sacredness of life and creation.

On Easter Sunday 2016, the worship attendance was 404. That is a sign of resurrection. The Holy Spirit is moving in this church and God we believe is calling you to more. What your worship attendance is on Easter is your immediate potential for what you can be worshipping every Sunday. Why is that important? Because it means more people discovering the gift that there is a way of life that is rich, and deep and life-giving and a community that will support them in that, and it means more people sharing in the mission and ministry of this church to be a Sanctuary for the City. We challenge you to live into your potential and what was perhaps imagined at the time of merger, but now, a very real possibility: a new church for this time and place, and one that is not just for ourselves but indeed for the whole city.

Immediate Steps

1. Town Hall Meetings

The congregation will hold two town hall meetings on April 17th at 11:15am and April 19th at 7pm to discuss these strategic recommendations.

1. Congregational Vote

The congregation will vote on this report, to either accept or reject it, at an official church conference to be held on May 8th immediately following worship and led by the District Superintendent. As per the Book of Discipline, all full members who are present may vote. The vote must be approved by a 70% majority to move to the next step.

1. Coaching

Presuming a positive vote, the HCI coach will lead an action planning session to formulate this report into a strategic plan for the next 15 months. The Covenanting and Re-Commissioning Sunday to launch our implementation will be May 22nd, 2016.