Healthy Church Initiative
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Healthy Church Initiative?
The Healthy Church Initiative is a two-year process of wondering, discernment, and self-study, during which we will receive expert coaching and assistance in further developing our gifts as a congregation. HCI is supported by the Minnesota United Methodist Conference in order to equip healthy congregations to develop and implement a 3 to 5 year plan to grow in spiritual passion, number, and vitality of mission. This is a process that helps good churches become great churches, by investing in their next steps.

Who is on our Leadership Team?
Pastor Mariah, Maggie Nancarrow, Jan Bajuneimi, Gil Young, Barb Deming, and Sharon Fields

What was the process used to develop the consultation report and the HCI strategic recommendations?
Last summer, our Church Council voted to accept the Bishop’s invitation to participate in the Healthy Church Initiative. Pastor Mariah and the five members of the Leadership Team started the Healthy Church Initiative process last August. Since then:

• Our leadership team attended three Saturday training conferences, and prepared an extensive self-study about our church.
• In February, our lead consultant, the Rev. Cindy Gregerson, conducted a 3-hour leadership session for 40 Hamline Church leaders and staff members.
• Mystery guests visited our church on 12 separate Sundays in the Fall and Winter.
• Thirty church leaders took the Natural Church Development survey in the winter.
• Cindy and the other consultants, including our coach Mimi Heines and our District Superintendent Dan Johnson, received these reports and evaluated them together with our self study.
• The final report came from our Consultation Weekend, March 18-20, which included:
  o a focus group of 12 church members who are active but not on the Church Council
  o a focus group Church Council members
  o a leadership development session which over 50 Hamline Church members attended
  o one-on-one interviews with Pastor Mariah and each staff member
  o worship and fellowship attendance on Sunday, March 20th
The consultants were met with the HCI team after church on Sunday, March 20. A first draft of the documents was reviewed and the team had the opportunity for conversation with the consultants. On March 31 Cindy and Mimi met with the HCI team and presented the second draft. After discussion with the group, a few minor changes were made, and Cindy finalized the report and recommendations, which the congregation has now received.

**How can I read the report?**

Paper copies of the report are available in the church office, and it can also be found online at hamlinechurch.org/hci.

**What does it mean that we’re going to have a “coach”?**

Mimi Heines, a certified coach and an HCI Consultant, will be working with our staff and lay leadership for 15 months to implement the recommendations, keep us on track, and provide helpful resources. Pastor Mariah will also participate in a peer group with pastors of other churches participating in HCI.

**How will we accomplish all this?**

Working with our coach, the HCI Leadership Team, staff and Church Council will come up with a detailed implementation plan with clear steps and a timeline to be worked through over the next several years.

**I like the church the way it is. Why make any changes?**

In one of our leadership development meetings, Cindy Gregorson challenged us with the question, “What is the purpose of the church?” If it is the purpose of the church to follow Jesus’ great commission to make disciples for the transformation of the world then we are called to do that more effectively. We are reminded that the Gospel never changes. However our methods and systems of sharing and living out the Gospel change to meet the challenges of today.

Our church has been through significant change in the past five years. Many of those changes were painful and frightening. However, we have now stabilized to the point where we can take on changes that are positive, and changes that we choose. Our consultants noted that our church had exceptional positive energy and enthusiasm, a condition where intentional change can create real flourishing for our congregation. We are at a point now where we can make intentional movements towards developing our church past ‘alive’ and toward ‘exceptional.’

**What will this cost the church in dollars?**

The Minnesota Annual Conference is covering the majority of the costs. Hamline Church will pay $3,000 and is asked to designate 1% of the church’s budget for emerging ministries that might come out of the recommendations. We are also eligible for Conference Grants to help fund new staff and initiatives.
**What will this cost the church in time and energy?**

We are in this together and everyone in the Hamline Church family is invited to be part of the journey. The Church Council, the Healthy Church Initiative Team, Pastor Mariah and the staff will be taking the lead. Nevertheless, the success of this process will be determined by the entire congregation’s level of commitment. There are plenty of places for everyone in the congregation to plug into the areas that most excite them about these new directions.

**Why did the Consultation Team put more emphasis on young people rather than our elders?**

Hamline Church has the opportunity to proactively involve our younger generations in the work of implementing Jesus’ great commission to “make disciples of all nations”. Church is one of the few opportunities in our busy lives when we are not segregated by age group: therefore, one of the church’s most valuable assets is encouraging inter-generational community. To embrace this, we must be more available to those younger people. If we don’t engage and invite younger folks to join, we may find ourselves like one of the 50 mainline churches in America who are shutting their doors each week. Hamline Church will continue to provide care and ministry for people of all ages, and work to strengthen our ministry to everyone in our community.

**Is the Conference controlling what Hamline can do as a church?**

No. A “yes” vote on the recommendations allows Hamline Church to move forward. The complete HCI Consultation Report lists “possible” implementation steps under each recommendation. We will determine how we move forward. Hamline Church’s leadership team and Church Council, in consultation with our coach, will determine the timeline for beginning the various recommendations. Implementation will happen over the next 3-5 years.

**How do we decide if we’re going to accept the Strategic Recommendations?**

On Sunday, May 8th, following the service a short Charge Conference will be held in the sanctuary for members to vote. This follows two informational meetings, held on April 17th and 19th, where the congregation had a chance to ask questions and make comments on the proposal. The vote will be taken by paper ballot, and the recommendations must pass by a majority.

To vote, members must be physically present on May 8th, as required by the Book of Discipline.

**Can we vote to do only part of the recommendations?**

No. The HCI Strategic Recommendations will be voted on as a whole. The five recommendations cannot be changed, but we do have the freedom to make choices in how we move forward in their implementation.
What happens if the recommendations aren’t adopted?
The vote at the church conference by all present will be to accept the entire proposal (i.e., all of the recommendations) or to reject the entire proposal. To reject the report would mean that we would not have the benefit of working with the coach provided by the Conference as our congregation moves forward.
In the five years that the Minnesota Annual Conference has been using the HCI process with over 25 churches, no congregation has ever voted against their recommendations.

This seems like a lot of change and a lot of potential expense. Can we really do this?
We cannot do this on our own. Only God, working through our congregation, can accomplish God’s mission in this place. Therefore, we are dependent upon God to provide for us the resources and opportunity to successfully implement these prescriptions. We are excited about these recommendations, and we believe that it will help us become better bearers of the Gospel to our congregation, our community, and the world. We believe that the positive energy behind these opportunities will make a way available for us.

This seems like a lot of change. Should we really do this at this time?
It is always good to ask what the right time is for change. The reality is that our world and our community is constantly in the process of change. Our pastor and lay leadership specifically voted to move into this step of the process and scheduled these events for this time. Also, God has great plans for us and we need to be prepared for the opportunities God will present. We cannot do this on our own. This is similar to Queen Esther in the Old Testament. We are placed here ‘for such a time as this.’

We are at a place now where our church is strong; the energy is positive, there are new people doing new ministries, and we have to add additional Sunday School classes. We have the opportunity to direct our future towards excellence in living out our call as disciples of Christ, and in order to do so, these changes present us with a path that we can choose, a path that will continue these exciting, positive trends for years to come.