

Composite/Summary of Session #6

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Taken from Group Leader Reports (all are on Basecamp)



How do you feel about the idea that churches are counter-cultural organizations? How true is this in your experience?

- I don't think those terms fit at this time.
- As we've evolved, the separation of church and state. Are we even a Christian nation any more with so many other religions present in our nation?
- Our values are different than the values in the world.
- The church is becoming more vocal over cultural wrongs. The church should be the first to stand up for social wrongs.
- The ideal world is that church and culture would exist side-by-side.
- There is a huge difference in the last couple of decades vs. now. The placement and importance of the church is not as prominent as it used to be.
- Counter-cultural sounds radical. We are not tossing radical ideas out there.
- We are caught between the world we live in versus the one we want to live in.
- Too much separation between "church" life and our lives outside of church.
- I feel that the church is becoming less counter-cultural. Political correctness, basic concepts of what is right and wrong, even "social justice issues" are pulling us away from basic Biblical concepts. By trying to please everyone, we've lost our standing to "turn the world upside down." We need to rediscover what it means to be a Church full of Christians that walk the talk. We need to be a true community of faith.
- Jesus didn't come to be threatening. Some who heard him felt threatened. The idea that Churches should be counter-cultural organizations is a turn-off for me. It makes it sound like our whole society has flipped. I don't think that's true. (Hollywood, music, mainstream media, social media platforms, and violent video games have certainly flipped.) Unfortunately, we are a silent majority.
- What is today's culture: loud, fast, distracted, impatient, critical, selfish, performance-driven, argumentative, jealous, rude, consumption-oriented, and entitled. It is an "us" vs "them" mentality. We, as God's children, are called to be listeners, learners, peaceful, attentive, patient, loving, and kind. We should slow down and ask ourselves: "What can I learn here? Does this moment call for stillness or action?" (Morgan Harper Nichols)
- Christians are always citizens of two kingdoms: (1) the earthly kingdom of self-rule, and (2) the eternal kingdom of God's reign/rule. The Church is counter-cultural in that it shows its allegiance and trust in the Kingdom of God now unfolding before us.
- We should be in some things but we don't believe St. Mark is focused on counter-cultural aspects.
- Jesus was hard on those during His time that "should know better" but mainly was here to make disciples and believers.
- Church and its beliefs counter the "me generation"- all about the individual- want it right now.
- Church now: Not about the individual, but rather the good for all...So serving others rather than self.
- Don't be afraid to be different. Follow our hearts, and get out of our comfort zone.
- I do think the church should examine carefully all cultural trends in light of what Jesus taught. We are not very good at bucking trends.
- Patriotism has become too blended in with Christianity in many American churches.
- Jesus operated outside the cultural norms and many American churches are rooted in cultural expectations and practices.
- Saint Mark and Methodism are less mainstream than many churches because of our outreach focus.
- We try to be more like Christ through outreach.
- Big Box Churches seem to have been a reaction to mainstream churches and therefore have attracted more people looking for something outside the norm.
- Church at its best is countercultural
- Too often we fall into the pettiness and power-plays that make up American culture
- Often mirrors the surrounding culture, but when we're our best it doesn't
- It's important to realize that even the phrase "counter-cultural" is used in different ways.

- When we say countercultural what we mean is opposed to the capitalism and wealth around us, and worry that sometimes the phrase countercultural is used to oppose justice movements for marginalized groups – for example some say people who are gay should not be able to be married in the church because even though culture allows this we “know right and wrong” and are countercultural.
- When we want to be countercultural we want to be against greed and against the power structures that hurt people.
- I have certainly experienced the church to be countercultural, even more often than not, but also experience that it’s still imperfect
- It should be, but it’s not. Why? Churches have some stake in the cultural marketplace. Membership may have its privileges. Mainline denominations tend to prop up the subculture they live in, and do not proclaim true Christianity. Saint Mark does seek to reach out to people on the fringes of society, but could do more.
- There is a lot of catering to what people want in almost every church. Why? Because we won’t fill seats if we don’t. Wear jeans, coffee bar, suits and ties, etc. Sharing Jesus should be the priority. Must use cutting edge technology in worship or folks won’t come. Must entertain folks in worship. There is a real consumer mentality that we cater to.
- There does seem to be an attraction to leaders in the church that help to highlight the counter-culturalism of Christianity. Jesus did not need all the “bells and whistles” to share the Word and bring change.
- I believe Jesus called his Jewish listeners/followers to live out the compassionate heart of God’s covenant with Israel. He incarnated "love power". The "powers" succumbed to the temptation of temporal, institutional power and control. Contemporary disciples will have to live counter to prevailing culture, to confront barriers to equity, and to identify and come alongside those on the margins of society. They (we) may have to leave the acculturated, accommodated institution and see what "new thing" God creates.
- We want to produce excellence in all we do, but if excellence keeps us from putting Jesus first, we are not being faithful. Perhaps this contributes to the Nones and Dones.

Since we are called to become disciples who turn the world upside down, how do we become those kinds of people?

- Relationships – with other disciples who call me up and see the good possibilities in me; with people who are different than me and are willing to share experiences; with people encourage this in me
- Watching others in church lead by example – this leads me to hope I’m doing this for others too
- Prayer and intentionally being prayerful is a big part of this for me
- Worship – especially when the sermon challenges me – Shawna’s sermon this past Sunday did this for me.
- Hearing stories of the ways people are turning the words upside down and the experiences that invigorated other people
- Sometime it’s getting out and actually doing the work – not simple sitting around our church talking about it but having our feet hit the pavement
- Prayer, training, support
- Through mission work abroad and acts of service at home.
- By educating and equipping ourselves through study and preaching to acquire the Biblical support and theological arguments to correct/convert adversaries.
- By learning Biblical history, doctrines, and theology.
- By restoring and maintaining the historic creeds and traditions of the church.
- By having a strong and on-going emphasis on Biblical teaching (e.g., more Sunday School classes, Disciple Bible Study, studies on books of the Bible, seasonal Bible Studies, year-round Bible studies for children/youth, etc.).
- Through Biblically sound teachings/Scripture in sermons with practical application as to how the Bible relates to our everyday lives.
- Is it upside-down or right-side up?
- We must keep an attitude of curiosity and learning.
- Through the daily study of God’s Word.
- Scripture, prayer, spiritual discernment, and obedience.
- Making worship a lifestyle and not just a Sunday morning experience.
- We need to get rid of the complacency/comfortableness that has filled us.

- Living with an attitude of hope when everything seems to be lost to others.
- Having joy and peace bubble from within – even in difficult times.
- We can't give up - thinking that we have done our part and that it is now time for someone else to do our work. We must serve through our final breath.
- We imitate Miss Patsy in Utica who never slows down and is constantly looking for ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus.
- We go to church on Sunday and for Bible studies to be nourished and the rest of the week we need to go out into the world, bringing Jesus' message and love to those less fortunate.
- The church has reached beyond the walls of our building, since we have a number of members who continue to worship virtually.
- Truly following "the Way" of Jesus.
- Do not be afraid to fail.
- Rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us as we seek to live faithfully.
- Be intentional – study God's Word.
- Be prayerful.
- Join accountability group/partner.
- We show others Jesus's message through our actions.
- Join faith formation group.
- Allow a manifestation of the Word of God to take hold in our lives.

What's our church's way of turning people into invigorated disciples?

- Providing many opportunities for mission work and community outreach (e.g., Salkehatchie, Wings for the Lord, etc.).
- Previous spiritual gift inventory to place members in the right opportunities.
- Get the children in to Sunday School where we can begin to teach them the Bible, the traditions of the Church, and the expectations of how to live as a disciple of Jesus. We have lost the pattern or expectation that Sunday School and Church attendance is nonnegotiable.
- Through on-going Bible Study classes and Sunday School.
- Serving and meeting the needs of our neighbors.
- Social justice participation, disciple training, inspirational preaching/teaching, mission opportunities
- Members of the congregation must be somewhat self-motivated. We can try to encourage, lead by example and discuss activities we are involved in that might appeal to others.
- Our UMW activities in support of DAR, and reaching into the community (Grace's Closet).
- The flower ministry.
- The Care Ministry.
- The ReShape initiative.
- Embracing budget increase for Missions in 2022.
- Saint Mark uses Bible studies, UMW and worship to nourish our members and we are constantly finding ways for our disciples to go out into the community to serve others.
- Saint Mark is one of the most serving churches they have been a part of.
- Practice stepping out of our comfort zone – the more we do it the more natural it will become and the more authentic our witness will be.
- The saying over the atrium doors, "You are now entering the mission field."
- Marvin's Kids is a wonderful way of invigorating our members.
- There are mission opportunities we provide
- We have some extremely invigorated disciples and others who are simply along for the ride
- Through the recent volatile events, our church has done well serving our neighbors and the most vulnerable as the scripture tells us Jesus prioritizes. It reacted quickly to needed changes in worship. It is a welcoming and friendly church.
- It's most helpful when the person facilitating an opportunity has such a passion about whatever it is that it excites others

- Pondering when we've felt most invigorated led us to think about Rise Against Hunger (being with others in the community and meeting a need); Ann Hope (doing something to help and interacting with people)
- Caring for each other is a part of this too
- Sometimes I attend a church event because a friend is organizing it, but it turns out to be meaningful and life-giving.
- Provide opportunities to be disciples – to serve.
- Provide faith formation groups for growth (Sunday school/small groups for all ages).
- Youth program.
- Provide meaningful worship for connecting to God and one another.
- Seeking qualified staff persons to help lead ministry in the church.
- Help disciples of Saint Mark to learn that we all have gifts to use in service to God and the church – staff can't do everything!
- Creating a disciple culture vs. member culture at Saint Mark.
- Our church's way of invigorating disciples is to offer opportunities to be involved in meaningful mission to the world.
- There is always something new to learn – we don't know everything.
- We become invigorated disciples by looking for ways to love the world to life

How well does this current mission mantra express our greatest aspiration as a church?

- Current mantra is too passive and unexciting.
- Doesn't require much of us.
- "To be" doesn't expect too much.
- "Make" sounds too aggressive. A goal-oriented "sales" mentality. Focus is on outward acting upon another instead of inner nurturing of ourselves.
- Too passive. What does "to be" mean? How do we know when we have met the criteria of "to be?" No clear call to engagement and personal growth.
- Our current mantra fits our church.
- We need to be specific in spelling out our actions
- We saw no need to change the mission statement of the church. Many felt this was not a good use of time and we did not gain much from the activity or question. Focus needs to be elsewhere. Implementation of our goals and mission is the most vital aspect!
- We all like our mantra but feel that the service component is missing from it. It was stated that once you are serving someone and you do it regularly, you establish a relationship with that person, which leads you to "witness" to that person in a more natural and effective way.
- I think it does? (x2)
- Would like it better if it included the "for the transformation of the world" as the UMC does
- It's not that it doesn't express the greatest aspiration, but it'd be clearer if it were "disciples who _____(action)"
- Our church's present mantra has been in place for about 5 years. It is an imperative statement. People respond better to an invitation.

What new mission mantra(s) did you identify that would describe/define our church?

- Separated by the world but bonded by Christ.
- Affirm/Share God by loving one another.
- More like Jesus, less like me.
- Living water for a thirsty world.
- Disciples-in-the-Making ... Making Disciples.
- Making us "one" in Christ.
- Win them to Christ and the community of faith.

- Sharing God's love, hope, and joy.
- The UMC denomination slogan is better than ours.
- The hands and feet of Christ in today's world.
- Offering hope in troubled times.
- Caring for the hurts of life.
- Open minds, joyful hearts in a hopeful world.
- Celebrating Jesus – serving our community.
- See one, do one, teach one. (medical language)
- Committed to Christ ... compassion for all.
- Showing God's love to the world through our words and deeds.
- Knowing, Growing, and Showing God's love.
- Knowing, Growing, and Showing God's love through action.
- To make and grow disciples for Christ
- Spreading His Glory by witnessing daily sharing His love and Grace in thought, words and deed.
- More definitive: Loving God, Pursuing Justice, Making Peace
- Maybe add something to our mission mantra to address visitors who come. To add a welcoming statement.
- Love God/Love Others/Serve God/Serve Others
- Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds
- Christ's hands and feet in the world
- Following Christ, Doing Justice, Loving Mercy
- Lead with the Love of Christ
- A Servant Spirit
- Learning to love others as Christ first loved us
- Love God, Love others
- Loving and serving others as disciples of Jesus
- I remember the creed that Steve Morgan used to often use – tacked on to the end of the Apostles' Creed – and think there are many key phrases for this *seeking abundant life for all humanity *struggling for peace with justice and freedom *risking ourselves in faith, hope, and love
- Do folks who see our mission statement know what a "disciple of Jesus" is or that it means?
- A disciple is one who knows, grows, and shows the love of God to others.

Can you identify common key words, thoughts, or phrases in these mission mantras?

- We need a clear identity. We need to know who we are.
- We must strive to inform and transform our lives so that when others look at us, and hear us, they too want to be here to learn how to live their lives like that.
- We must fill our "wells" to overflowing to be able to pour Jesus out to others.
- We must find a level of comfort/security in our faith here in order to go out and find/meet/challenge others where they are.
- Joy.
- Hope.
- Faith.
- All action verbs.
- Knowing, Growing, and Showing
- Love
- Open
- Service
- Make peace.
- Love people.
- Serve.
- Open ears ,open eyes.
- The service aspect – that love urges us to do something for people
- Be and make are key words that show that action is taking place through the ministries of the church.

If you were tasked to plot our church's way forward into the future, what reference points/benchmarks would you be sure to include on the map? What incremental steps would we take to make sure we reach our goal? How will we measure/gauge our success along the way?

- Prepare congregation for General Conference and the aftermath of General Conference
- Immediately update access to live online worship to all. Our current online worship is not accessible without the link pushed out. People searching for a church service will never find ours. The link MUST be placed on the web site asap.
- Within 3 months we should have a new order of worship for BOTH services. The Traditional service must be more meaningful and should include the weekly use of the traditions, creeds, prayers, and liturgy we used to have. The Contemporary service must include more upbeat/recent songs and should incorporate the introduction of some (not all) of the traditions, creeds, and prayers central to our faith. Go back to the full hour format asap. Worship "lite" and Sunday School "lite" is just not working.
- Must see a noticeable growth in children and youth attendance.
- Restructuring and emphasis of Sunday School time, classes, and studies.
- More offerings of short and long-term Bible studies to equip and educate members.
- Make a plan to reconnect, care, and encourage current members of the congregation.
- Renewed emphasis on Pastoral/congregational/community care with emphasis on elderly, sick, hospitalized, depressed, isolated, missing, and less visible members of our congregation. Our Stephen Ministers used to help with much of this.
- Maintain a strong music program throughout the church.
- Have a premier children and youth ministry within 2 years.
- Regular and systematic Bible Studies offered at different times of the day.
- We need to know what our community needs. We need to do an in-depth assessment of the people in our community. Who are they? What are they dealing with on a daily basis? We must truly get to know them.
- We need to recognize visitors, not make them take the initiative to walk to the back of the building and scan a QR code. Need "Pew Captains" to identify, welcome, and greet new persons. A Hospitality Committee may be formed for this ministry.
- Distinct and joyful worship services that are truly Traditional and Contemporary.
- Active and vibrant children and youth programs.
- A network of caregivers, led by the Pastor, or the Pastor's designee, who will work to meet the needs of the congregation.
- A coordinated mission/outreach oversight designee. It seems some mission/outreach events are "owned" by a group/class and is kept private. We often don't learn about an event until we have read about it in the Heartbeat.
- We need to understand the financial impact of programs/outreach upon the Church's budget. Must monitor Church resources so that we don't come up short.
- Community outreach and PR. Everything we put out there (social media, streaming, webpage, etc.) needs to be excellent. This will help promote a clear image of the Church.
- I feel that we need to emphasize what we have in common. We need to figure out ways to better support our members (e.g., Stephen Ministries, Pastoral care, and small groups). We need to continue all the outreach programs that we already have but possibly add more in conjunction with other churches or organizations.
- Young families with children are not going to find us ... we need to figure out ways to find them.
- Develop a strong Community presence/PR that draws the attention of those seeking answers to life's many new questions.
- Short-term and long-term Bible studies that equip adults to live their lives differently...and to make a difference in the lives of others.
- I would like to see a commitment to local mission - something like 10% of our budget no matter what the total budget ends up being.
- Our music programs were successful in the past and I think the community choir that Laura Ritter is starting is a positive in that direction. The summer art and Bible camp was also a great idea. Is there an active Young Life program at Seneca High School and Middle School? Why not offer up the Gym to them?

- I think one measure of success will be gauged by the number of St. Mark members that are willing to be involved in community outreach programs.
- We at St. Mark need to do “Inreach” programs (Knowing, Growing, Showing, & all church ministries) effectively, to ensure that our Outreach priorities and new focused initiatives are impactful. There appears to be some overlap and fragmented objectives, without communication to other groups with common direction. Also, we encourage the COS and church leadership to first “sell” and implement our ReShape “Inreach” initiatives, then proceed to strengthen our St. Mark outreach.
- In the past St. Mark has done surveys to spark interest in ministries, this should be revisited with very direct and close follow up with those interests funneled to the appropriate ministry team A major concern is where are leaders of the next generation. The current majority of our congregation is aging and many have been “doers” most of their lives.
- It is not helpful to come up with a wish list without commitment from each of us. Acknowledging how God is working in us can give us strength to accept new tasks and possible leadership roles for growing and caring for our congregation.
- Tweak and support existing program. We have had community volunteer organization fair in the Atrium (our ReShape group did not know what church committee was responsible for this)...groups like Ripple of One, Meals on Wheels....
- Extend existing programs (eg Marvin's Kids) into year long association with families. "It has touched my life". "I support my families financially for things like summer camp, prom expenses". "We adopt them" "Do this year round is life changing"
- Meet our community needs.
- Continue family support and direction chosen by Sunday School class(es) (eg .the Cannon family).
- Work in already established ways to meet the needs of our congregation- reach out to our congregation shut - ins(home or assisted living), folks without computer access, with: printed Heartbeat info, deliver church service bulletin weekly, offer off-campus communion on appropriate Sundays.
- Learn more about not competing with Mega church operation and Services over Methodist tradition and worship.
- Most importantly – prayer! Put God first and discern what he wants Saint Mark to do through prayer.
- Bible Study
- Talking with others
- Praying for open spirit and hearts to be accepting of change.
- Handle conflict or the potential for conflict with transparency and good communications.
- Utilize small groups for implementation since these have worked so well.
- One way to better offer/invigorate people might be to offer opportunities at different times and with childcare – can’t attend during a workday

What is your primary takeaway from our group time today?

- We need to emphasize serving community and our congregation. Could be through organization that already exist.
- Members deeply care about the church and the community.
- Our highest aspiration should’ve to serve others and to reflect Christ’s love.
- Same goal, different perspectives.
- The Church is in transition – but where are we going?
- A lot of commonalities – most concerns and goals are the same.
- There is a strong desire to improve St. Mark.
- Passion for the church and each other.
- A number of our core competencies (Sunday School, worship, children, youth) are broken. These need to be addressed and fixed immediately.
- Theological basics that need to be agreed upon.
- Organized religion is hard.
- We all need to discern what the Lord wants us to do.

- St. Mark lacks a plan on how we work together to equip the saints.
- Re-start Stephen Ministry asap.
- Get busy with focusing on our children, youth, and young families.
- Worship services need to be addressed immediately.
- Love God and love our community.
- It is important to serve according to the needs of the world, not to engage in arguments about dogma.
- Project joy and hope for those living in the shadows of hurt and despair.
- Radical Hospitality - a welcoming attitude filled with joy and hope.
- We feel our church is on the right path for discipleship.
- We feel that we are doing something good for our church.
- This process is making us think!!!
- This is helping us think more about what God wants us to do.
- How do we prepare ourselves for the times ahead? Earnest Prayer.
- Prepare for Reality. Don't hide from facts; be aware.
- The United Methodists will be facing many issues in the upcoming year. Some may even be divisive. I pray the church will remain strong. These issues may take precedent over how our church reacted to the tornado and the pandemic
- Our church services: on-line worship is valuable; in-person worship brings people in; the choir is active and very good; we have 2 services (traditional and celebration) - people have a choice of how they want to worship.
- The church was seen to be an asset to our political atmosphere.
- Most people in politics were people of faith and now is viewed as enemies of the State.
- The church is no longer important in our country today.
- The State is suggesting that children no longer be "indoctrinated" by their parents/grandparents by taking them to church and homeschooling.
- We do not want just to compile data and answer questions without changes. Our group wants information regarding the ReShape group responses to be shared to the whole congregation. We agree the goals determined by the ReShape process should be frequently regarded at meetings, in sermons, in Sunday school classes and evaluated for progress. If goals are not being met determine why and if that goal remains relevant.
- We have concerns that while we feel on-line worship is important that it may not encourage in-house participation or plugging in to ministries.
- We feel small groups are going to be vital going forward. More groups like Elderberries need to be formed and encouraged.
- As our population ages we must continue to care for them.
- Small groups should always address what is the mission of their group in order to grow. People working together builds a sense of purpose and involvement.
- New small groups meeting times need to be addressed. Set aside a time for various groups to meet and develop new ministries. Options could be Sunday night or Wednesday nights.
- Our current church worship services and Sunday school class times are not working. Celebration attendees must leave service early to get to their class and atrium duties allowing no time for fellowship. Sunday school time is greatly encroached upon by announcements, relevant information sharing and choir rehearsal so that only a few minutes are left for study and class time. This should be addressed now rather than waiting several months due to congregation frustrations.
- Our group feels that Saint Mark's greatest strength in discipleship is our focus on outreach ministry.
- We are on the right track – continue to live into our mission statement in every way possible.
- We are forward thinking – not getting stuck in ruts. We do have to be careful in looking backward – and “snapback” church.
- There is a cost to being a disciple – we have to put ourselves “out there.”

Additional Observations by Small Group Leader:

The group was passionate about ideas regarding making disciples and understanding how to make that happen.

Some expressed difficulty in completing the assignments due to confusion and/or lack of personal perspective.

Our session lasted 1.5 hours. We moved through questions #1 and #2 fairly quickly. The bulk of our time was spent in question #3. A lot of thoughts and observations were made that we eventually consolidated into what is printed above. These “benchmarks” or “way points” may be of value to the leadership team during the discernment phase of the plan.

Spent a little bit of time on the mantra question. Not a whole lot of interest/importance here. Most of the time was spent on Question #3 and its relevance for the leadership team to develop a destination and clear “waypoints” that we can all move in sync towards. Everyone is still extremely hopeful for St. Mark’s future. I began to detect a sense of urgency in the development of an action plan as a result of the data provided by these small groups. They appreciated what Jeff had to say on Sunday and in the Heartbeat. There just seems to be a growing feeling of “we need to get busy now” doing some of the things that have been repeatedly lifted up. I shared yet again the proposed timeline expressed in the Heartbeat article. Folks are ready to get going.

We were all in agreement that it is one thing to communicate the ReShape plans, but the larger imperative is to “sell & market” our new initiatives. We have 150 people engaged small groups, and that is wonderful. But we need to not only communicate our new directions, but also “sell” the plans to receive maximum commitment for all initiatives/changes. (We have several in our church who are not engaged or are happy with the status quo, and all of us need to be involved and supportive.)

Our group wants transparency regarding the information gathered by coordination team and would appreciate a re-gathering of small groups or of all ReShape participants to discuss the findings. Each small group has a personality and another group may have insights to topics we may not have focused upon but could be very significant and meaningful. This would be best initially when the guide is developed and again a few months down the road to assess progress.