

Foreword – About ReShape

The Reshape Transforming Church Initiative is a process developed by Mark Tidsworth, Team Leader of Pinnacle Leadership Associates, a consulting firm to churches based in Columbia, SC. Pinnacle’s own ReShape purpose statement defines the process this way:

“ReShape is a guided process for capturing and integrating the innovation and adaptation resulting from volatile life experiences, transforming churches into greater expressions of the body of Christ.”

At the March 2021 Council of Stewards meeting, our leaders began a conversation about engaging the ReShape process as a response to: concerns about “the state of the church” after one year of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the desire to develop a growth strategy for the church (this will be explained further in the body of our report).

All COS leaders spent some time in April reading the ReShape book to discern whether to use this process at Saint Mark. At the end of April, COS committed to proceeding with ReShape.

The process involved the formation of small groups of Saint Mark disciples, each with a leader trained in the use of course materials in how to lead the ReShape process. The groups met for eight weeks in the fall of 2021. The feedback from these small groups was collected, organized, and reviewed, with the primary goal of identifying the areas of greatest interest/concerns among our disciples concerning the health and growth of Saint Mark.

A ReShape Coordination Team was recruited to lead the church through this process. The team members include:

- Pastor Todd
- Pastor Shawna
- Jeff Weicksel – overall Coordination team leader
- Gary Baker – Leader of Communications and Launch Event
- Bob Dobson – Leader of summarizing and reporting back on input from Small Groups-
- Pat Reynolds – Leader of Small Group leader recruitment and training
- Andy Campbell
- Lisi Campbell
- Curt Evatt
- Beth Baker

David Brown of Pinnacle Associates was assigned to our Coordination Team as “coach” to help us “keep on track” through the process.

The team was ready to announce the ReShape process to our disciples in worship on August 22. We were blessed with participation from 152 disciples, who were divided into 12 small groups. Small group meetings began in September and ended in November.

The Saint Mark disciples who led these small groups included:

Todd Davis	Rodger Chapman
Billy and Sally Boggs	Ken Minton
Bob Rider	Lynn Dobson
Don Taylor	Shawna Darnall
Sandra Lowe	Lisi Campbell
Donna Poston	

We thank these small group leaders for their invaluable contributions to the ReShape effort – without them, this study would not have been possible.

The coordination team has been working since then on organizing the responses from the small groups and discerning what these responses were telling us about our disciples' hopes and dreams for Saint Mark. Our report is on the pages to follow.

Jeff Weicksel – ReShape Coordination Team leader
January 2022

INTRODUCTION -- WHY RESHAPE?

Pre-2020 Conditions

Pre pandemic, Saint Mark was a healthy church with many active ministries, and yet the leadership of the church recognized some early signs that suggested action might be necessary for the longer-term health of the church:

- Attendance at worship was trending downward at both the traditional and contemporary worship services for several years along with participation in other traditional programming – e.g. Sunday School, Wednesday night family nights. Several scheduling changes, including revised Sunday morning schedules and less frequent mid-week activities, did not appear to reverse the declines.
- Our church family was growing older, reflecting primarily the reality that the number of younger families with children was declining. This trend was reflected in a decline in our youth and children’s ministries.
- While the church was financially solvent, ministries were being constrained because costs that “had to be paid” made up a disproportionate amount of the budget; examples of these “must” costs were: clergy and staff costs; mortgage payments being made on the campus revisions made in 2008; maintenance costs on the building and grounds; and apportionment payments to the United Methodist Church.

The Pandemic and The Tornado: Our Major “VUCA” Events

In early 2020, two unexpected events occurred that caused Saint Mark to suspend its “normal” ministry activities. We consider these events to be prime examples of “VUCA” events, where VUCA is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity:

- The pandemic caused by the emergence of the Covid 19 virus and several mutations of the virus. In mid- March of 2020, containment protocol established by national health authorities forced the closing of the Saint Mark campus and required a rethinking of how ministry could take place. Almost every facet of our church life has been impacted, as in-person ministries initially came to a halt, were initially replaced by technology solutions (on-line worship, Zoom meetings, etc.) and now are in a period of gradually being restored as pandemic protocol and local conditions permit.
- An EF-3 Tornado that struck Seneca – and specifically the Saint Mark campus and neighborhood surrounding the church – in mid-April. The needs of the church campus, church family, and the community around us became a focal point for increased action, and the church responded in very positive and affirming ways.

The pandemic remains a concern today (January 2022), with changing containment protocol making it difficult to move forward steadily with restoring Saint Mark’s ministries and re-establishing programming for all ages. While the effects of physical damage caused by the tornado to our church campus and much of the Seneca community have been addressed, the knowledge gained about our community’s needs as a result of the tornado and pandemic have created a new sense of commitment to these needs.

Additional Disruptions

We are also aware that other changes have been taking place while we have been dealing with the VUCA disruptions. These changes took place Internally (within the church), externally (in our community and society) and within the United Methodist denomination.

Internal Changes

- Staff retirements, along with plans to reconfigure the church staff, resulted in four experienced staff members leaving the church in this time. In response, Saint Mark has created and filled three new staff positions in the last twelve months. A period of adjustment is now necessary as we integrate the new staff members and their redefined positions into the ministry plans for Saint Mark going forward.
- A special campaign to repay the remainder of the mortgage was completed in February 2021, creating some welcome relief to the budget pressures we have been feeling.

Both actions created opportunities within our budget to do more of the ministry activities we have been unable to consider in recent years.

External Changes -- Additionally, the growing socio-economic and racial divides in our country, and the polarizing nature of our political parties – particularly as reflected in the campaigning during the 2020 elections -- created pressure for the church to develop meaningful, Christ-based responses that would address injustice while helping to promote healing and unity.

Denominational Influences – Looming over all these other concerns is the uncertainty of what will happen to the United Methodist Church at the next General Conference (GC) where the LGBTQ issue will be the primary issue. GC is currently planned for September 2022 (but may be postponed again if concerns and conditions related to the pandemic globally cannot be resolved). Whatever is decided, our faith community will have additional choices to make at that time about its future.

The Response to These Changes: Reshape

Considering all these factors, COS reached a consensus to proceed with the ReShape Transforming Church Initiative in April 2021 with several objectives in mind:

- To use a structured process for gathering and organizing thoughts from our church family about how Saint Mark had responded to the changes it had faced and what the future might look like
- To develop a framework for growth for Saint Mark
- To take advantage of the “pause in church life as we have known it” caused by the pandemic and tornado and our responses, to reflect on our experience and discern what direction we wish to go and not just unintentionally fall back into “church as usual”
- To bring our church family closer together by inviting them to share their personal experiences with the pandemic and tornado in small groups, and to hope and dream together about what more Saint Mark could do
- To make every effort to ensure that we are seeking God and His will for our church.

Faith Statements of That Which Does Not Change

As part of ReShape, our disciples were asked to reflect on what the VUCA events taught us about the things that do NOT change in our faith. The following statements are examples of those that were shared during the small group meetings when participants responded to a question about what it is that endures, sustains, and guides their faith. Some of these statements were contributed by individuals; some were summary statements that the group developed together. Altogether, they are representative of the many statements that were shared:

“God will always be there for me”

“The good news is that God is working all this out for good even if I can’t yet see”

“I believe in one loving and present triune God. I feel that God is always present. I may not always understand why and how God is working in my life at any single moment, but I am confident in His presence.”

“God doesn’t change.”

“We believe that God’s love is constant and His promises tell us His church is protected.”

“We are called to be an example of Christian love in all circumstances.”

“Seek to live according to God’s will.”

“God is our constant. Through prayer and support from our family and friends, our faith is strengthened. Our faith gives us great hope and optimism through the hard times and helps us to know that God wants us to work, serve, and care for others. Our church is where we get grounded. Saint Mark provides so many ways for us to serve.”

These faith statements provide a foundation of hope and shared commitment to making Saint Mark the best embodiment of what God would call us to.

The Saint Mark Mission Mantra

The Saint Mark mantra was established three years ago; it is “Be and Make Disciples of Jesus Christ.” During the ReShape small group meetings, our disciples were asked to evaluate the Saint Mark mission mantra to see if it seems appropriate for current times. While there were some suggestions for changes/improvements, the general consensus was that this mantra is appropriate and expresses our greatest desires for Saint Mark and what we believe God is calling our church to do.

Debriefing Letters and Psalms

One group meeting in the ReShape process was dedicated to having our disciples speak about their experience and reactions to all the changes that have taken place in the past 18 months. This included opportunities to share comments in a group discussion setting, as well as preparing personal letters addressed to God that spoke about their experience and outlook at this time. For those who were comfortable, there was an opportunity to share their letters to God with others in a small group experience; this proved to be a very heart-felt, emotional experience for everyone who participated.

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While these debriefing experiences were very personal, there were also several common themes that included:

- How much we all missed our church; a realization of how important it is in our lives and the connections that the church brings
- A new perspective on how important family connection is in our lives – and experiencing the frustration and hurt for all the things we could not do – weddings, birthdays, births, funerals. The pain caused by family losses was magnified in this time of separation.
- Feeling the hurt, loss, separation from relationship – physical touch
- While each of our experiences were individual, we “heard ourselves” in others’ stories
- We gained perspective on our own feelings by hearing others – “I thought I had it bad until I heard someone else’s story”
- The tornado actually provided an opportunity to refocus our energy on the needs of our church campus and the community – it gave us a cause that helped draw us together when so many things seemed to be separating us
- Our losses were small compared to how great God is – God’s grace was present every day no matter what happened
- We are not alone! We have God and we have each other
- HOPE IS EVERYTHING!
- Our church leadership – pastoral and lay leadership needs to be clear in the direction the congregation is to travel – strong enough to lead through the questions/divisions that may be coming

The Coordination team found that these themes were reflected in the types of ministries that our disciples are calling for.

WHAT HAS OUR EXPERIENCE WITH “VUCA” EVENTS TAUGHT US ABOUT PATHWAYS FORWARD FOR SAINT MARK?

To “capture and integrate the innovation and adaptation resulting from volatile life experiences,” our Coordination Team has focused on determining “pathways” forward for Saint Mark—areas that our disciples would like to see leadership focus on improving. As part of identifying these pathways, several questions were intended to encourage better discussions and to assess our church’s readiness to move forward with any changes. These questions included:

- How do we see ourselves as a church?
- What are we good at today that we want to continue?
- What could we do better at?

How Do We See Ourselves as a Church?

- A church that is adaptable – we have gone through many changes and have been willing to try many things
- A church that is capable of responding to needs when the cause is understood – e.g. the response to the Tornado (money, time and talent)
- We are aging as a church family – and this concerns us. Churches are more vibrant when there is a healthy blend of generations.
- A church that offers true connection
- A church that offers opportunities to grow in faith
 - Faith that is engaged – involved – participating
 - Faith that is Bible-based
 - Faith that encourages seeking – new ways to know/grow/show God’s love
- A church that has tried to find multiple ways of meeting the needs of our community – local, national, international
- A church that seeks to be grounded in faith for all its activities

What Are We Good at Today That We Want to Continue?

- Social opportunities for older people – e.g. elderberries
- Sunday School for ALL AGES
- Ministry opportunities based on interests and needs – e.g. Gospel Choir, quilting group
- Music that is inspiring in both worship venues
- We believe we are a welcoming church
- Through our outreach ministries, we show people God’s love – e.g. Rise Against Hunger, Potato Drop, Marvin’s Kids
- Live Worship, with Two styles of worship -- both have a place and meet different needs
- Spiritual development – small groups (particularly Sunday School) and bible study

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What Could We Do Better At?

- Caring for each other – and the needs have been heightened by the separation caused by the virus – e.g. pastoral care, contact with shut-ins, hospital visitation, bereaved, those who have not been involved in church life for some time
- Caring for the community – the tornado created a new awareness of just how much need there is in the community,
- More Bible Study/spiritual growth opportunities – while this is an area that we do well, there was a lot of expression about doing more
- “Inviting people and promoting our church in the community
- Contemporary worship could be strengthened by being more “upbeat” and innovative in what it offers
- More effective communication – e.g. “Heartbeat (our church weekly newsletter) is overwhelming”
- We have more to learn about livestreaming worship – quality of the product and the opportunities to use it

AND....

- *We Are Not Good at Attracting Young Families and Young Adults* – e.g. worship and meeting/activity schedules, communication, level of commitment

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Considering the factors that led to embarking on the ReShape process, and in consideration of the answers to these “background questions” about our church and our readiness to accept change, the Coordination Team believes there is a common overarching theme to the desires of our disciples:

We Are Looking For Connection

- With our God – worship (in-person and on-line), disciple development and bible study
- With each other – caring for each other (more pastoral care), small groups based on common interests
- intergenerational opportunities
- With our community – outreach

We continue to learn through our experience with being separated by COVID that connection cannot be taken for granted, and that it needs to be intentional and refreshed to remain meaningful.

Our ReShape groups spoke about seeing a world that seems increasingly separated and divided – and how we seek a place where we can feel connected, even in our differences.

When thinking about connection, our disciples commented frequently about the need to communicate effectively, particularly when we cannot be together physically.

POSSIBLE RESHAPE PATHWAYS FOR SAINT MARK

The primary tool in ReShape for defining our pathways forward involved an exercise we called the “bucket” exercise. Our disciples were asked to consider the activities at Saint Mark (as of Fall 2021) and to place these activities into one of the following three buckets:

- The *Continue* Bucket – for activities that should be continued, whether they were activities that were restarting as COVID restrictions were relaxed, or were changes that were implemented in response to COVID restrictions that they believed were beneficial
- The *Stop* Bucket – for activities that should be stopped, whether they were activities that were suspended because of COVID and were not considered to have value anymore, or activities started in response to COVID that were not viewed as having lasting value
- The *Explore* Bucket – for activities that disciples would like to pursue to move the church forward – ideas that may have existed before COVID, or became apparent because of changes related to COVID – ideas that Saint Mark was not pursuing at the present time.

In addition, our team took the responses and sorted them into the Five Core Functions of Church as defined by Pinnacle Associates:

- Worship
- Disciple Development
- Disciple Care
- Serving Neighbors
- Managing Assets

By looking at the “Continue, Stop, and Explore” buckets in each of these functional areas – and by looking at the volume and frequency of comments -- the Coordination Team was able to identify several pathways to focus on that seemed to have the highest priority from our disciples.

The pathways identified by our review of the ReShape response can be divided into two basic groups:

- *AREAS WHERE THERE IS A PATHWAY* – As outlined below, these pathways reflect general agreement that work should begin, or continue, in these areas. Specific actions to be taken are intentionally left up to the church committee(s) that are responsible for overseeing that area of church life; the comments and specific suggestions of our church family will be made available for the committees to use. In several cases, the pathway as identified may require actions that are ongoing; this would suggest that our disciples support the current direction of an activity and would like to see more opportunities.
- *ISSUES STILL SEEKING CONSENSUS* – While there are fewer of these items, these are questions that are more difficult to respond to and require developing a consensus on how to proceed.

Note: The pathways that are discussed below are summarized on one page on Attachment 1. Attachment 2 provides a matrix where responsibilities and priorities for completion are detailed.

AREAS WHERE THERE IS A PATHWAY

Connect with God through Reimagined Worship – for the most part, we seem to be on the right path with what we do in both styles of worship services. To move further down this pathway, our disciples are encouraging us to focus on:

- Worship Fundamentals – keep improving on what we are doing
 - *Continue offering two styles of worship services – Traditional and contemporary worship*
 - *Seek opportunities for special worship gatherings and worship experiences, including having “guests” participate in worship.* Also, are there opportunities for lay people to be more involved in worship – to improve worship and to promote spiritual development?
- Music Ministry – building on this key part of the worship experience, as this is something we do well!
 - *Continue the pursuit of excellence in this area (guest performers)*
 - *Finding more special music opportunities including “blending” different music genres in both worship styles.*
- Developing Excellent Hybrid (In-Person and On-line) Worship – this is clearly understood to be a “work in progress” with exciting potential. Commonly mentioned areas of focus included:
 - *Determine the best platform for streaming, both live-stream and video replay.* The experience our disciples reported with our current “state of the art” suggests we need to improve quality and reliability -- meaning better sound, reliability of connection – as well as developing a better understanding of who is watching online. This could also represent an outreach/evangelism opportunity for introducing our church to others.
 - *Creativity in developing worship elements that are engaging in hybrid settings.* We can do a better job of making the on-line worship experience more engaging by what takes places in the live worship
 - *Consider the technology and personnel needs to support two worship spaces.* This could involve more equipment purchases, as well as recruiting/hiring/training of more people to support two worship services on Sunday mornings; a realistic assessment of what is needed is a good place to start here.

Connecting with God through Spiritual Growth – This pathway touches on the content of small groups/Sunday School materials, as well as the content of our Worship services and the types of service activities our disciples can participate in. As with Worship, our disciples indicated how important spiritual growth was to them and commented favorably about our spiritual growth actions to date. They also had suggestions for further improvements, as noted below:

- Look for opportunities for church-wide studies – the understandings we develop can be richer when we all are looking at the same questions – a greater exchange of ideas and perspectives on faith
- Keep “curriculum” current and fresh – this could mean new Sunday School classes or new special studies groups

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- Christian perspectives on social issues – there were several expressions of interest in learning more about a Christian perspective on social issues today, with the caveat that the learnings need to avoid the politics of the day and remain balanced in their perspectives of what the issues are about

Connecting with Each Other

- Improved Communications
 - *Redesign of the Heartbeat newsletter to highlight more effectively our key messages*
 - *Continue finding ways to use technology to enhance our communications* – for example, the use of texting to reach disciples, or different social media platforms, or continued use of video announcements in worship to highlight their message
 - *Continue to update/educate our disciples on our church activities and expand to include our organizational structure* - The use of video Stewardship moments in worship this past year illustrated the value of informing our church family of the things we are doing; this could be continued and expanded into areas such as church organization to highlight how disciples can match their interests with the church's needs
- Disciple Care
 - *(Re)Connecting with those who are not participating in the life of our church presently* – as COVID continues to affect our church long beyond what we had expected, the need to reach out to our inactive and/or often absent disciples is an important part of showing how we care for each other as a church family
 - *Being Intentional about visiting shut-ins and making hospital visits* – again, ever-changing COVID protocol make this difficult, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that our church family needs connection in the tough times and when they cannot go out themselves to join our planned activities
 - *Building on the care-giving efforts of pastoral staff* – the demands on the time of our pastors and staff are high, but our responses show that individual disciple care is critical. We must find ways to keep contact high and to maximize the opportunities for our pastors to visit with those in need of a reassuring word. Do we need a dedicated care-giving staff member?
- Continued emphasis on providing fellowship opportunities for all disciples and groups – the value of fellowship in supporting each other is clearly recognized, our disciples appreciate what we are doing and would welcome additional activities and variety as ways to enhance our fellowship

Connecting with the Community

- Communication as Evangelism – helping the community know our love
 - *“Telling our story in the larger community, so that others might come alongside us to pursue God’s mission together”* – We believe there is an opportunity to say more through social media about our activities in the community, and that this story would be attractive and draw new people to our church

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- Mission Engagement – showing our love to the community
 - *Leveraging our efforts by working with existing community aid groups* – looking for ways to magnify our “investment” in community outreach supporting agencies that are established in providing services – in addition to funding the efforts of these agencies, looking for creative opportunities to actively support them (more ideas like Potato Drops and Rise Against Hunger).
 - Specifically, *explore new opportunities to share our facilities with outside groups.* This may have implications for building use and insurance policies that must be understood. The perception is that our building and campus could be an important asset in aiding the community, and that we should look for these opportunities.

Anticipating/Facilitating Growth

- Children/Youth/Young Adults – most likely the greatest challenge for our growth
 - *Staffing transition creates new possibilities* – with Maria and our interns now part of our staff, we have new possibilities and new perspectives on what can be done in this area. We need to give our new staff members an opportunity to evaluate our situation. (There is a longer discussion about growth plans later in this report).
 - *Realization that this is a longer-term, church-wide priority* that everyone in the church must commit to – providing education in what needs to be done, and in following through for the “long haul.”
- Sunday School/Small Groups
 - *Provide groups with resources for in-person and on-line interaction as needed* – our continuing experience with COVID and with weather disruptions only highlight the opportunity that exists to keep disciples connected to their small groups through technology even when they cannot participate in an in-person meeting.
 - *Different scheduling and time options relative to other weekly activities* – always keeping in mind the needs of the volunteers and participants in our groups and how to make it easier for them to be active members of their small groups.
- Leadership Development and Succession Planning
- Education and Preparation for General Conference - Can we model a church that unites in its missions and accepts that each of us is different? Our disciples are asking for the church staff and lay leadership to communicate openly about what is happening regarding General Conference so that they will understand what is happening and what is expected of them. While most of this is not well defined at this time, it is a significant concern to many in our church family. *This concern cannot stop us from determining what we see God calling us to do in Seneca; in fact, by proceeding forward, we may come to know ourselves better so that, if and when a decision comes to us, we have a shared sense of who we are and what alternative(s) would suit us best.*

WHERE THE PATHWAY IS NOT CLEAR: ISSUES STILL SEEKING CONSENSUS

The ideas that we are undecided about have similarities:

- They typically involve leadership from more than one area – and making coordinated decisions across our “functional chimneys” is difficult
- They can be viewed as having benefit in achieving the pathways that we have outlined – but if poorly executed they can be more detrimental and a drain on our resources.
- Their resolution may depend heavily on the consensus we reach as a church about “who we are,” “who we want to be” and “who we do NOT want to be” (discussed later)
- Timing for resolving these issues is difficult to set in advance – as they are explored, there is a strong possibility that there will be more “interested or affected parties” in the decisions that are reached, and as a result the scope of the effort may expand.

Looking at the specific issues:

Reconsider CDC

- This would affect our CDC Steering committee, the Trustees, and potentially our Family Ministry, Service/Missions (Community Outreach) and Evangelism (attracting CDC patrons to join us) activities.
- The questions that have been raised include:
 - What is the role of CDC as it relates to Saint Mark?
 - Do we see the CDC as a doorway for people to become involved in Saint Mark?
 - Are we offering a service that the community needs?
 - What can we do to improve the service that the CDC provides?
 - Do we need to rethink the agreement that we have with the CDC as a separate entity?

Reconsider Wednesday nights

- This topic affects disciple development/faith formation, family ministries, and disciple care (fellowship)
- This is an opportunity for intergenerational activity with a history of declining attendance
- We recommend a cross-functional working group headed by Family Ministry (Maria) and need to have discussion with her about how this item fits with other priorities that she has at this time.

Reconsider Sunday morning schedule:

- This topic affects Worship and Hospitality teams, Faith Formation (Sunday School), Disciple Care (fellowship), Family ministries (working with the life schedule of young families), Tech team and the church staff
- We recommend a cross-functional working group with representation of all affected people to determine what is possible –

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Church Organizational Structure

Answers to the questions and concerns raised about our Organization Structure and decision making should come from COS. It may be appropriate (necessary?) for the Lay Leadership team to have input, but the question of whether our structure supports effective and timely decision making is one that all COS activities should share in. The questions being raised include:

- Is our overall structure too complex? Is it too difficult to promote innovative ideas?
- COS role as decision-making and coordination body
 - Is it too big?
 - Should it meet more frequently?
 - Is it capable of overseeing progress?
- Does our church family understand our structure? Said differently, is the organizational structure a problem, or something we just need to communicate more about so that our disciples understand it better?
- *We need to be certain we are staffed appropriately* -- we are an aging church, and even if we bring in young families, in many cases both parents work and we end up competing for a place in their busy lives, all suggest that *we cannot rely on volunteers to be sufficient – either in time or talent*
 - Disciple Care – a deacon?
 - Youth programming – we need to give Maria the opportunity to evaluate this question, but do we need dedicated resources for youth to identify with (seminary students? Children/youth pastors?)
- Are we structured properly to address the needs that are defined through our work initiatives (including those things recommended in ReShape) – for example, is Technology organized properly, and well positioned in the organization to fulfill the role(s) it plays? Should Technology be its own administrative function (like Finance, Staffing (SPRC), Trustees)

Consensus on our Identity – A key issue that really remains unanswered

In our ReShape deliberations the Coordination team could not identify any consensus among our church family in answering these two questions.

- *If we cannot be all things to all people, what do we want to be as a church? and*
- *What is God's unique call to our church in this community?*

The answers to these questions would go a long way to defining our identity and would also have critical implications for how we determine to grow the church.

Our coordination team did not find answers to these questions in the ReShape responses.

During our discussions among ourselves and with David Brown of Pinnacle Associates, we considered some additional perspectives that go beyond just the ReShape responses:

- A “simple” answer might be: The things we are good at may be our callings. Conversely, things we are not good at – maybe these are not our callings.

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- We need to be careful that our ministries are not dictated by what is comfortable or easier for us to do – but we need to recognize those realities. “Who we are today” in many ways reflects not only what we are comfortable with, but things we seem more capable of supporting.
- If there are activities that would attract young people/families that we do not have the resources to do properly, then these may be things that really are not important to our church family – or at least not important enough to support instead of other choices that we have supported.
 - Our difficulty in attracting young people may be more a function of how good we are at making our offerings more attractive and/or accessible to some groups of people than others (e.g. when activities are scheduled, what the content in these activities is, etc.).

WHAT CAN RESHAPE TELL US ABOUT A GROWTH STRATEGY FOR SAINT MARK?

All of which brings us to the question of growth – particularly in attracting more young adults and young families with children and youth to our church family.

The truth is, a growth strategy is not a product of ReShape by itself. ReShape has strengths and limits to its role in strategy development, including:

- ReShape provides unique and valuable opportunities for disciples to connect with each other, drawing the church family closer together (particularly after this time of physical separation caused by the pandemic protocol)
- ReShape gives a good sense of what areas of church life the leadership should be focusing on, based on what our disciples are saying is important to them
- ReShape gives valuable feedback on what ideas our disciples may have to contribute to these areas
- ReShape can give a sense of priority – what areas should be addressed first
- ReShape does NOT produce a “Business Plan” – a full workplan for how to address the areas of concern/opportunity that are highlighted by our disciples. The way to address these concerns must come from the responsible work groups, where all ideas can be considered (including things that were not specifically recorded in ReShape notes).

These “caveats” apply when we look to ReShape results for formulating a growth strategy. As the late world-renowned business consultant Dr. W. Edwards Demming once said, “Customer expectations? Nonsense. No customer ever asked for the electric light, the pneumatic tire, the VCR, or the CD. All customer expectations are only what you and your competitor have led him to expect.” In the same way, our disciples want our church to grow. And while they shared this concern -- and in some cases offered suggestions for how to grow, we believe they are looking to their leaders for inspiration and guidance in how to grow.

The Coordination Team has discussed the question of growth at length, and offer these suggestions based on our understanding of the ReShape responses, along with a healthy dose of our personal experience and perspectives of Saint Mark’s situation today. The following four steps can all be pursued simultaneously, and we believe all have value in fueling growth.

Step One: “Build It”

The ReShape responses suggest a belief that the things Saint Mark offers and continues to make high priority activities as identified in our ReShape feedback – worship (music), fellowship (for older disciples), Spiritual Development, neighborhood outreach – would be attractive to many people – particularly a community of “newly retired” people that have been coming to this area for several decades now. Offering two styles of worship is viewed as an advantage for us in providing Spiritual Growth experiences with broader appeal.

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Step Two: “Go Tell It on the Mountain”

Starting with our program strengths today, we should begin finding ways to share our story with the community, in ways that will find those who are seeking a meaningful relationship with God.

- CONTINUE BEING ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY with our outreach plans, announcing when those opportunities will take place, so the community can see us in action.
- PUBLICIZE to the community what we are about – in various outlets and media.
- Specifically, USE TECHNOLOGY to make our message viewable for “prospectors” – using live stream and video as part of our evangelism, along with multiple social media platforms that appeal to a wide audience

Step Three: “Try us – you’ll like us!”

- DEVELOP PLANNED WAYS to identify and approach people who are moving into the community. Programs like Mission Insight that identify where new people are moving into the community could help with this effort.
- REMAIN A WELCOMING CHURCH FAMILY so that when people make the effort to attend our church activities, they are made to feel welcome and valued.

Step Four: “The Personal Touch -- We All Have A Story To Tell”

- We need to impress on all our disciples that we all have a role in inviting people to the church.
- We need to learn how to “tell our story,” to speak our faith in ways that other people can see as genuine expressions of our love of God and His work.

The Coordination Team recognizes that implementing steps like these will require the support of the entire church family. *We also recognize that there is nothing in these steps that speaks specifically to the issues that exist in attracting young people and young families to our church. It is clear from ReShape responses that this is a priority desire of our church family. We see the choice to “walk down this pathway” as one that we all embrace to at least some degree -- nowhere in our ReShape feedback did we see the opinion that we should ignore young families when developing our plans*

We must learn how to attract young families

- We need to educate our entire church family on how to make disciples of young families in our community – how to create meaningful opportunities that will attract young families and young adults who are looking for spiritual growth and deeper fulfillment that comes from serving others as Christ served others – “making disciples.”
 - Maybe young people do not want to give money (or do not have money to give) to community causes, they may want to participate in community-focused activities. They may want to be appreciated for what they can give – money, time and talents, etc.
 - Maybe young people do not need to be over-burdened with more time commitments unless they see the value of this experience compared to other community action groups

(cont.)

- They may need alternative opportunities for how and when they have worship, Sunday School, small group experiences, church committee participation – the times that suit our older population often conflict with other “musts” that these families face.
- Can we provide services the young parent needs – childcare, transportation to after school activities, family time experiences along with “peer time” activities (spiritual growth as well as social opportunities)
- Everything we do today is (understandably?) geared to an older audience because that is who we are – this is much more likely to be true than thinking that we are intentionally scheduling things to exclude younger families and young adults. The unintended result may be that we are making ourselves less attractive to younger families as we seek opportunities that serve most of our disciples.
- We need to evaluate “what it will take” to offer programs that are attractive to young families and young adults, in ways that make them more easily available.
- The Coordination Team would recommend that this evaluation begin by working with Maria Bowers and the rest of the church staff as they define how our new Family Ministry focus at Saint Mark will work.
- The team also recommends that we look for ways to start educating our church family now in what may be necessary to bring young families to the church; there may be books that are available on the subject that we could use as part of a church-wide awareness program. We would want to ensure that such studies were supportive of the direction of the Family Ministry program.

ACCOUNTABILITY – FOLLOW-UP AND SUPPORT FOR RESHAPE ACTIONS

The Question of Accountability – providing follow-up and support to improve the chances for successfully pursuing the recommendations of ReShape initiatives -- has also been raised.

The Coordination Team would propose the following steps to provide accountability and group support for achieving our ReShape pathways:

- COS should be the entity that keeps all its member activities accountable
- COS should achieve consensus on giving out assignments to various parts of the organization
 - COS should take the lead on organizing any cross-functional study teams.
 - The ReShape Coordination Team may be asked to provide clarification on what the pathways and questions are about, and on providing information from the ReShape materials that are relevant to the groups being charged with making plans/decisions. The complete set of summaries of the responses from each small group for the eight weeks of ReShape meetings are also included as attachments to this paper.
- Once assignments are given out, the progress being made should be part of COS reporting until the assignment is resolved
- If additional help from COS is required, the groups involved should make this known as soon as a need is identified (do not wait until the next COS meeting). Jeff Weicksel or Cecil Turner (Vice-Chairman of COS) would serve as the contacts who would be notified of any need for COS involvement in between COS meetings.
- There are many actions in response to the ReShape questions that COS does not have to approve – these should be taken when the responsible group is ready to take an action, and COS should be informed “after the fact.”
- If the responsible group work team(s) that they need COS blessing before proceeding with an action, then COS should be notified, and a judgment made as to whether the decision can wait until the next regularly scheduled COS or should be expedited.
- Reporting will continue on each pathway/activity until the COS determines that it is not necessary any longer.

Timing Considerations

The Coordination Team is reluctant to name specific timing for completion of each pathway/action:

- Many of these pathways are ongoing work – as identified in the matrix
- Other pathways we do not feel qualified to provide a “reasonable” timeframe target. We may see these items as “high priority,” but we believe that to “do the work right” we cannot set arbitrary timing.
- If questions become “bogged down,” we expect that this will become apparent by reviewing our progress on these pathway/actions at all COS meetings – and we could address the issue at that time.

Concluding thoughts on the pathway forward for Saint Mark after ReShape:

- The completion of this study is just the beginning of the real work of ReShape.
- We all have a part to play in considering what we have heard from our disciples – it has been a great opportunity to know more about the “heart” of our church.
- What is reassuring in this work is seeing how hopeful our church family is, and that they are supportive of so much of what we are already doing at Saint Mark.
- We may find that, as we walk down some of these pathways, some will not bear fruit. We may also find that other pathways emerge. What is most important is not necessarily that every insight in this paper is “spot on;” what IS most important is that we need to begin the “walk” together with the spirit of support and cooperation, knowing that we all want Saint Mark to pursue and find God’s will for our church family.
- Pastor Todd likes to talk to us about “holy experimentation.” This is the epitome of a holy experiment – we will get out of it what we put into it.

Thank you for the opportunity to launch this experiment!

The Saint Mark Reshape Transforming Church Initiative Coordination Team