



**THE DISCOVERY TEAM  
REPORT**

**PREPARED FOR  
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
PALM BEACH GARDENS, FL**

**JULY 28, 2020**

July 28, 2020

Trinity United Methodist Church Leadership Council  
Attn: Ms. Neilann Chakis, Chairperson  
9625 North Military Trail  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410

Dear Ms. Chakis:

In early 2020, the formation of a Discovery Team was approved by Trinity's Church Leadership Council for a period of time ending in July 2020 to help the congregation discern possible pathways for Trinity's future as a sustainable and viable church. The members of the Discovery Team represent a cross section of the Trinity Community who researched, compared and contrasted different pathways available for Trinity's future. The following report contains a summary of our findings.

Respectfully submitted,  
DISCOVERY TEAM

Suzy Bryant  
Jonathan Deyling  
Susan Deyling  
Ryland Dodge  
Kathy Filippelli  
Jean Gaspard  
Katie Gettinger  
Tanya Marie Greaves  
Sue Holden  
David Huntoon  
Clark Knapp  
Jason Lynn  
Robert Rowland  
Rev. Tim Smiley  
Heather Tate-Boldt, Facilitator

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## **SCOPE OF ASSIGNMENT**

### **Introduction**

According to an early mission statement, Trinity United Methodist Church, established some 60 years ago, exists to know Christ and share His love. This community of faith has expanded over the years to include not only the church but also Trinity Christian School and the Christian Community Counseling Center, all of which are located on the same campus on Military Trail in Palm Beach Gardens and collectively referred to as the Trinity United Methodist Community. As the church, school and counseling center are interrelated and interdependent, they are considered one community. The church itself has seen a gradual but steady decline in membership, attendance, and giving over the last several years with an aging congregation and aging facilities that need maintenance, which is of great concern. The combination of all these issues leaves the entire Trinity Community in a situation that requires attention.

### **The Discovery Team**

The Discovery Team was created to have an established, formal group of church members who represent all areas of ministry within the church to meet together for a period of six months in order to guide the Trinity Community in a discernment process.

### **The Process**

The Discovery Team practiced “adaptive leadership” as described in the book, *Canoeing the Mountains, Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, which can be defined as leading the learning process of a group who must develop new beliefs, habits, or values; or shift their current ones in order to find new solutions that are consistent with their purpose for being. We have identified five phases to describe our process of meeting, loving and learning that the Discovery Team participated in. While each phase is distinctive, they are overlapping and allow for the process to be adaptive and flexible.

- **Phase 1: Adapt, Purpose, Goals**

During Phase 1 we established membership and adopted our purpose statement, goal, and timeline. We developed a shared covenant agreement in order to create a safe space where team members learn to trust each other and build on our mutual skills and abilities. We created and adopted a meeting schedule.

- **Phase 2: Data Collection and Observation Time**

Data collection happens in various ways such as by group meetings, key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and research done by various members. Subgroups were tasked with outside interviews and research, and then presented on different areas of the Trinity Community and important aspects of the vitality of the community. The core of Phase 2 happened during the second phase of Discovery Team development, but Phase 2 is an ongoing process that never stopped during our time together.

## **SCOPE OF ASSIGNMENT**

- **Phase 3: Current Reality**

During Phase 3 we identified and clarified the current reality of our Trinity Community. We interpreted the data and observations. We identified strengths and weaknesses within our community by assessing our resources such as physical, personnel, emotional, and financial. We began the work of identifying our core values and current mission statement. We reviewed trends and assessed Trinity community needs.

- **Phase 4: Assessment**

During Phase 4 we identified trends and commonalities to the data collection and observations. We developed an agreed upon summary statement to describe our current assessment.

- **Phase 5: Solution Focused**

During Phase 5 we crafted ideas and thoughts on possible solutions and strategies that would help us resolve the problem statement. We spent time speaking to the stakeholders who would be impacted by these solutions and ideas. We developed strategic recommendations to the CLC for review and decision.

The following presentation details these five phases.

## PHASE 1: ADAPT, PURPOSE, GOALS

### Beginning Stage

The mission statement of the Discovery Team is to guide the Trinity Community in discerning and articulating Trinity's next steps in the life and ministry of Trinity United Methodist Community. The following members of the Discovery Team are church members who have been formally appointed through the nomination committee and elected by Trinity's Church Leadership Council (CLC). They represent several stakeholder groups: church committees, school board, staff, missions team, long time and newer church members, youth group volunteers, parents of students at TCS (and graduates), and two representatives from the "ad hoc" group who started the initial conversation with Christ Fellowship.

Suzy Bryant	Leadership, "Christ Fellowship Kingdom Partner" Member
Jonathan Deyling	TUMC/TCS Staff
Susan Deyling	Missions, Long Time Church Member
Ryland Dodge	Newer Church Member
Kathy Filippelli	TCS School Board Member, Newer Church Member
Jean Gaspard	Long Time Church Member
Katie Gettinger	Leadership, Long Time Church Member
Tanya Marie Greaves	Current Band Leader, Church Member
Sue Holden	Youth, Long Time Church Member
David Huntoon	Leadership, "Christ Fellowship Kingdom Partner" Member
Clark Knapp	TUMC/TCS Staff, Long Time Church Member
Jason Lynn	Young Adult, Youth Group Volunteer
Robert Rowland	Leadership, Long Time Church Member
Rev. Tim Smiley	Pastor
Heather Tate-Boldt	Community Christian Counseling Center Director, Facilitator

The Discovery Team's goal is to identify the current reality, our mission, and purpose as a community of faith and to develop strategic recommendations for adoption and implementation by the Church Leadership Council and Trinity's Church Conference.

### Covenant

The Discovery Team collectively wrote and agreed upon a Covenant for our group, as follows:

- Attendance will be a priority.
- We will have clear communication about "prep work" needed prior to meeting time.
- We will make every effort to complete prep work ahead of time, and we will come prepared to work.

## **PHASE 1: ADAPT, PURPOSE, GOALS**

### **Covenant, continued**

- We will be transparent in external communication about the process, while protecting the confidentiality of our internal conversations.
- No one will speak for anyone else in the group without permission.
- We will agree on a main message to communicate outside the group.
- We will pray for each other and will remember that we are all part of the body of Christ.
- We will carefully listen to one another and we will set our judgements aside.
- We are not here to change one another's positions. (Speak to be understood, not to convince.)
- We will trust that the Spirit is at work in our conversations, even when we disagree.
- We will speak truthfully with love, kindness and gentleness, and trust that others are doing the same.
- We will encourage and allow everyone to participate, no one to dominate, so every voice can be heard.
- We will remain open to correction or recommendations for resolution if we breach the covenant.

### **Subgroups**

We organized subgroups to efficiently cover all the different aspects of this endeavor. These subgroups included:

- Christ Fellowship Kingdom Partnership: Consider this local non-denominational church to partner with Trinity and incorporate into their system.
- Community of Hope: Consider how this successful local UMC can offer training and leadership development.
- School/Church Subgroup: This group will look at best practice procedures of other church/schools and consider TCS taking a greater role in the Trinity Community.
- Big Ideas Group: This group will consider and implement ideas for the Trinity Community to be more connectional.
- Digital Task Force: This group will cover different aspects of using digital formats.
- New Normal Group: This group will look into revitalization aspects and ideas that the Unstuck Group have presented in different podcasts/webinars.

## **PHASE 1: ADAPT, PURPOSE, GOALS**

### **Ephesians 3:14-21**

Undergirding our assignment is the following scripture:

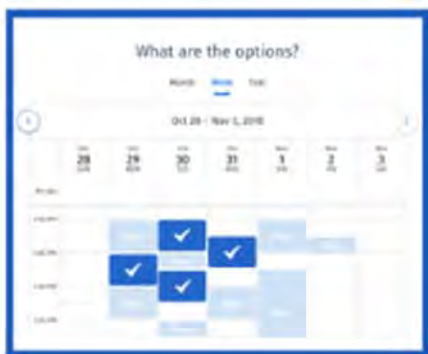
*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*  
*Ephesians 3:14-21 (NKJV)*



## PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION AND OBSERVATION TIME

The Discovery Team met for a period of time starting in February through July 2020 on the Trinity campus and offsite as well. A meeting schedule was discussed and adopted using a “Doodle Poll,” which allowed everyone to have input into meeting times and schedule. See example below:

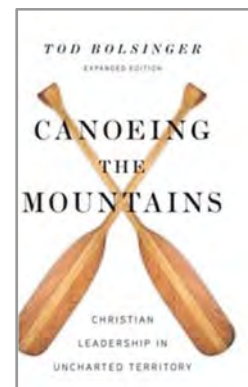


### Pick your date and time choices

Choose the potential date/time options for your meeting.

Meetings and discussions were held, tasks and work projects were assigned, and data was collected and analyzed.

The Discovery Team read *Canoeing the Mountains, Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, by Tod Bolsinger, which is based on Lewis and Clark’s explorations into uncharted territory while pursuing a waterway to the Pacific Ocean. The story parallels the issues facing today’s church in our rapidly changing world which we read with a focus specifically on the Trinity Community.



## Research

In order to investigate and explore these issues, our research included:

- Reading numerous articles and research data including:
  - “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” the link: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/diverse-leaders-group-offers-separation-plan>
  - “Draft Provisions of an Indianapolis Plan,” that you can see here: <https://www.umnews.org/-/media/umc-media/2019/09/25/14/39/basic-provisions-indianapolis-plan-aug-2019.ashx>
  - “Defining and Growing an Inclusive, Gracious and Evangelical Center: The Future(s) of the United Methodist Church,” written by Bishop Ken Carter: <https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/defining-and-growing-an-inclusive-gracious-and-evangelical-center-the-future-s-of-the-united-methodist-church-13171395>

## PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION AND OBSERVATION TIME

### Research

- Addendum to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016.*”  
Here is the link:  
[file:///C:/Users/kcget/Downloads/BODAddendum&Errata\\_Dec2019.pdf](file:///C:/Users/kcget/Downloads/BODAddendum&Errata_Dec2019.pdf)
- Participating in and listening to various webinars and podcasts from groups such as Christ Fellowship and the Unstuck Group, among others;
- Visiting other churches to attend worship services, explore websites, and interview pastors;
- Presentations by Clark Knapp on separate occasions regarding Trinity’s finances;
- Teleconference interviews and correspondence with Rev. Alex Shanks, Assistant to Bishop Ken Carter with the Florida Conference, and Rev. Dionne Hammond, Atlantic Central District Superintendent;
- Presentation by Jack Hill, member of TUMC, on Trinity’s history that included Trinity Pastors, Yearly Membership/Weekly Attendance figures, Staff Salary vs. Senior Pastor Salary, Yearly Income/Giving, PBC Tax Assessments, Facility Summary, and Music Ministry data;
- Presentation by Suzy Bryant and Mike Eissey regarding the Christ Fellowship Kingdom Partner Subgroup;
- Collecting and analyzing Trinity history data, current small group data, surveys, and interviews with present and former members of Trinity’s congregation;
- Trinity Christian School history, core values, mission statement, current status, future goals, and ideas for growth presented by Vernita Martial, Principal, and Susie Maione, Assistant Principal, on separate occasions;
- Interviews with outside sources including other churches that have schools;
- Review of previous in-depth look at Trinity that was completed in 2015, called, “Ministry Action Potential Study,” (MAPS study) and the recommendations of authors Dr. Phil Maynard and Dr. Jeff Stiggins; and
- Start the process of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of Trinity.

Note that documents associated with presentations are available for viewing on the Trinity website at <http://TrinityPBG.org>.

## **PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION AND OBSERVATION TIME**

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

In early 2020, the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic necessitated the closing of Trinity's campus and subsequently, all gatherings, including school classes, church meetings, and worship services have been restricted to teleconferencing and virtual formats. Discovery Team meetings have also been disrupted and replaced with GoToMeetings, and planned visits, interviews, Town Hall meetings, etc. had to be cancelled or postponed. Trinity will implement a phased approach to re-opening the campus when the time is right.

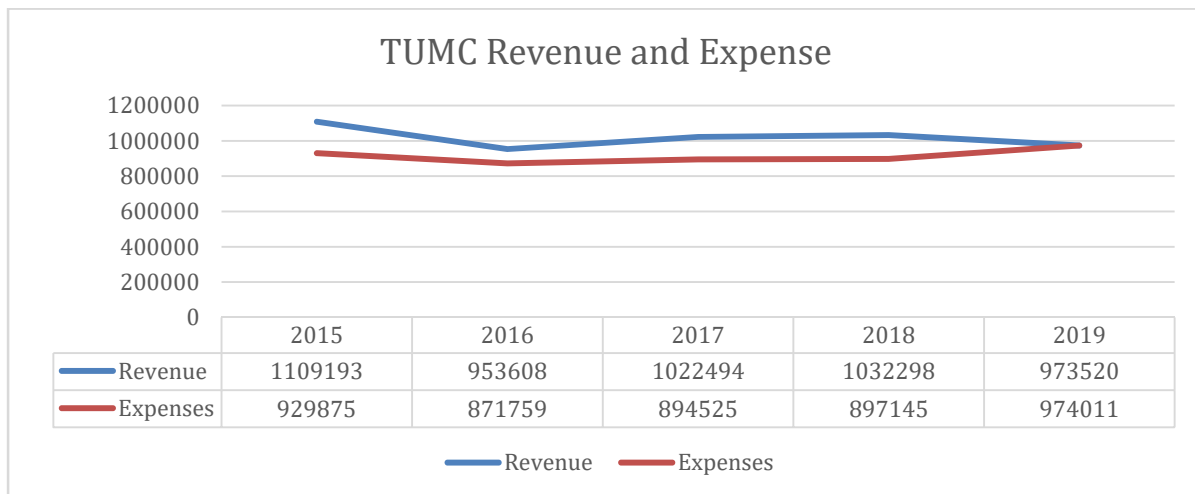
### PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

#### Finances

Trinity United Methodist Church of Palm Beach Gardens, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation providing services typical of a denominational church. Most of the monies received for operating the church come in the form of offerings and donations. The church’s accounts are maintained on the cash basis of accounting and the statement of assets, liabilities and net assets resulting from cash transactions and the statement of revenues and expenses and changes in net assets – cash basis reflect only cash received and disbursed. The fiscal year of TUMC is January through December. The church has a policy to manage its liquidity and reserves following three guiding principles:

1. Operate within a prudent range of financial stability,
2. Maintain adequate liquidity to fund near-term operations, and
3. Maintain sufficient reserves to provide reasonable assurance that the long-term obligations will be discharged.

For purposes of the Discovery Team and in order to simplify an explanation of the finances, the following graphs were created to indicate trends over the past five years. A five-year overview of revenue and expenses for TUMC follows:



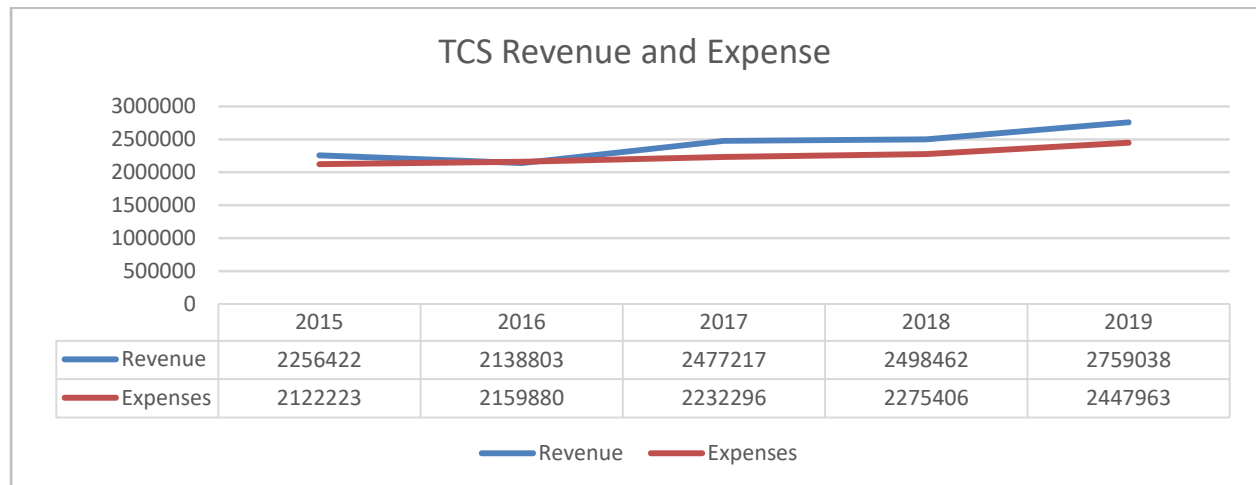
According to the final report from the auditor, the following table reflects the church’s financial assets (cash, cash equivalents and investments) as of year-end 2019.

### PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

#### Finances

<b>Financial Assets at Year End - 2019</b>	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	360,220
Investments	710,051
Due From Employee	635
<b>Total Financial Assets</b>	<b><u><u>\$1,070,906</u></u></b>
<b>Less Amounts Not Available to be Used Within One Year</b>	
Net Assets with Donor Restrictions	206,695
Less Net Assets with Purpose Restrictions to be Met in Less than One Year	<u>(206,695)</u>
<b>Financial Assets Available to Meet General Expenditures Over the Next 12 Months</b>	<b><u><u>\$1,070,906</u></u></b>

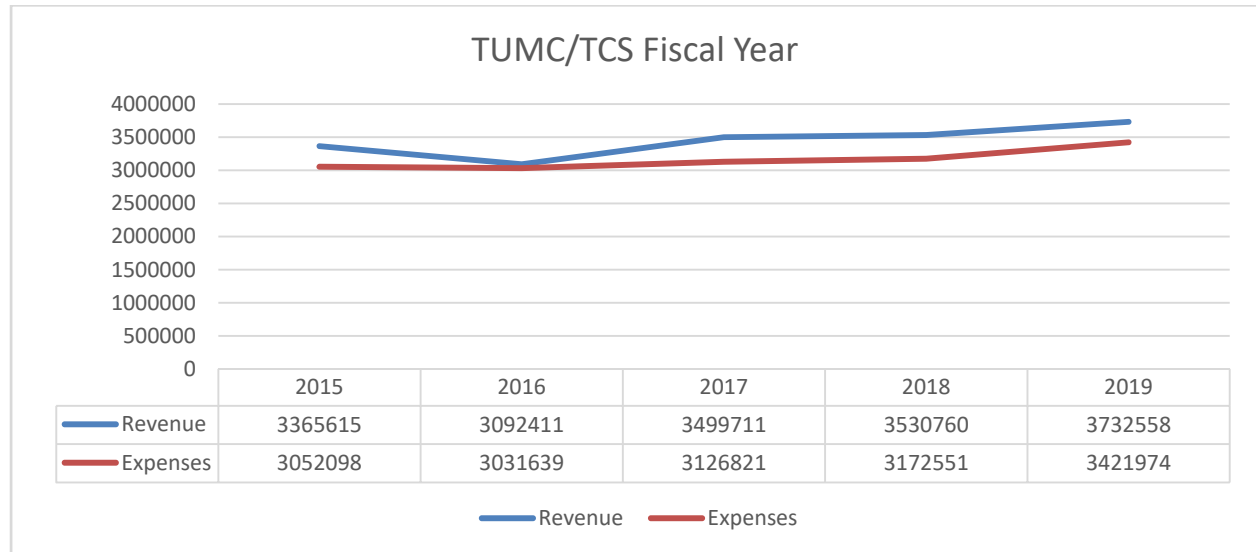
As part of the Trinity Community, Trinity Christian School operates a preschool facility for children ages one through five, and an elementary school and middle school for students through the eighth grade. Monies received for the school come in the form of tuition, fund raising, and donations. Their fiscal year begins in July 1st and ends in June. Starting in 2017, revenue exceeded expenses and the school has operated in the black since that time, a trend anticipated to continue throughout the 2020/21 school year.



Although the finances of TUMC and TCS have different fiscal years, the monies are together in the “same pot”. The following graph shows a five-year revenue/expense trend combing the two entities.

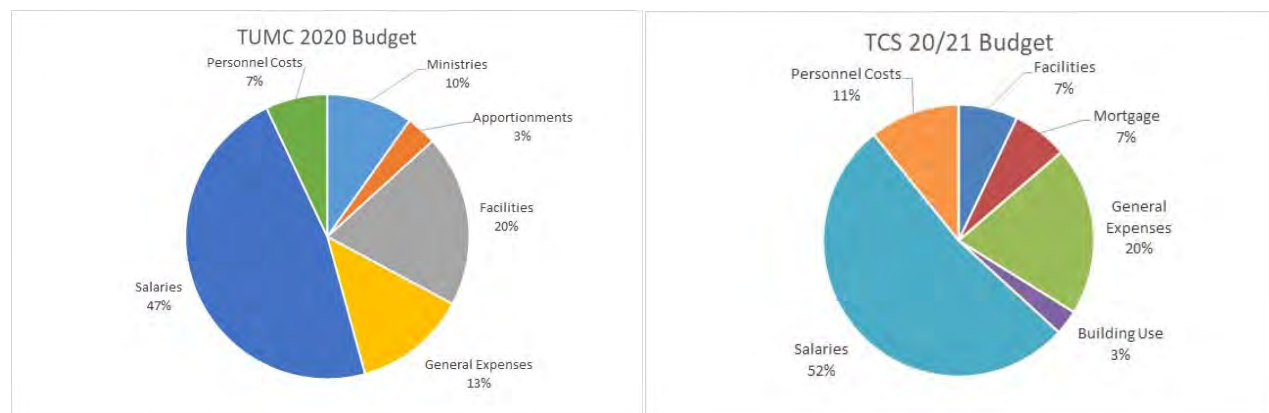
### PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

#### Finances



The TUMC five-year graph indicates expenses exceeded revenue in 2019, but the combined TUMC/TCS figures show that the combined revenue exceeded expenses for 2019, and this trend is anticipated to continue into the future especially considering TCS’s current enrollment with several classes having a waiting list.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has currently disrupted church life, it is anticipated that there are financial assets available to meet Trinity’s general expenses over the next twelve months. The following pie charts break down the budgets of both TUMC and TCS into general categories and shows these anticipated expenses for their respective current fiscal years.

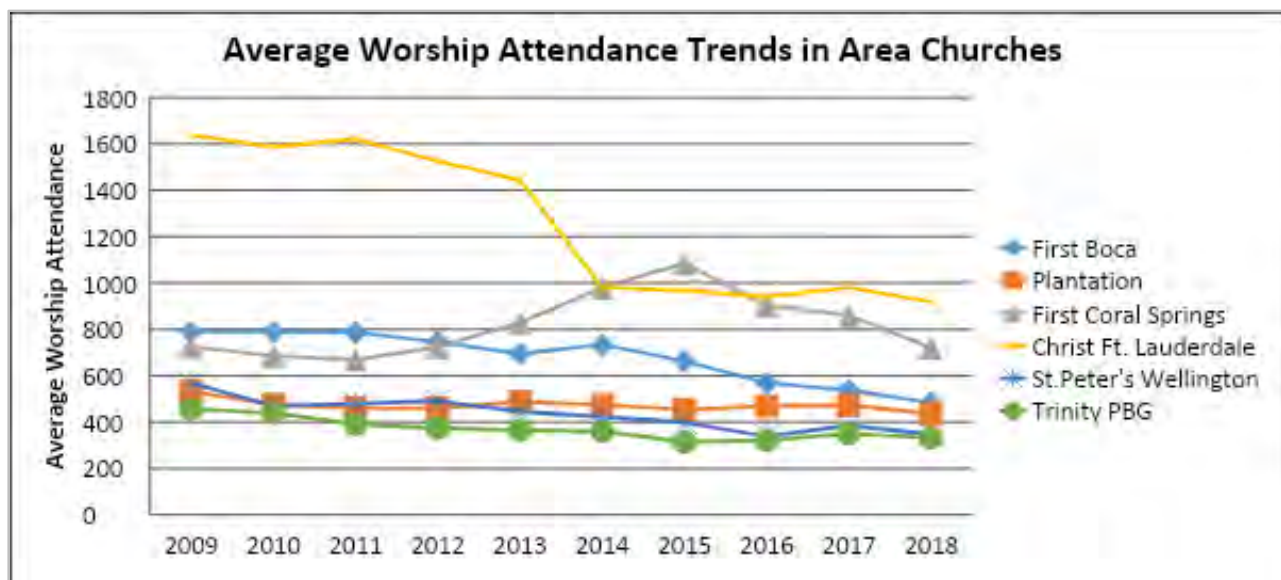


In summary, Trinity’s finances are currently stable. Continuing efforts at right-sizing the campus, looking at the usage of the campus, and reviewing current designated accounts are some ideas that should be considered as next steps.

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Church Attendance

The decline in church attendance across the USA has complex causes, but pastoral changes are one factor that can impact individual churches. The following chart shows that Trinity's attendance trends over the past 10 years follow those of other South Florida churches.



The following occurrences may provide some context to attendance changes at TUMC:

- Pratt-Whitney and RCA moved away from the area;
- Christ Fellowship, a non-denominational mega-church, was established in the area;
- Frequent pastoral changes;
- Loss of a senior pastor (for moral reasons) and a youth pastor at the same time;
- Wide ranging array of ministries that are fragmented without a clear focus on building disciples;
- Inability or lack of desire to change with the times to remain vibrant;
- The lack of a system or process for new members to connect to the congregation.

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### 3 Question Congregational Survey

A cross section of the Trinity Community were asked to participate in a 3-question survey resulting in a wide variety of answers from the 30 or so participants. The questions and summary of their answers follows:

*Q1. When were you most excited or felt the sense of deepest connection to our church? What was happening during that time in your life and in the life of our church?*

In general, people felt connected with their family participating in strong programs, activities and ministries, and making friends which provided the deepest connection to our church. The most used terms included church family, our family, relationships, children, activities, programs, and connected

*Q2. What has changed in your life or in the church since then that may have affected your sense of connection or excitement about our church?*

Answers related to problems with pastors and those in leadership positions being divisive and not following Jesus, followed by a decline in attendance. Poor leadership decisions and actions led to disappointment with how Trinity was being run which led to mistrust resulting in many leaving the church. The older age of the congregation and lack of younger people was also mentioned.

*Q3. What is one wish/hope/dream you have for the future of our church?*

The hope for Trinity's future is one filled with God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and scriptures to grow and develop spiritually, and a desire for more young families and people in general to attend the church and work together.

The book we read, *Canoeing the Mountains, Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, told of another church who conducted this survey. The example church's conclusion, "Our church was not particularly good at helping people stay connected through life and church transitions." They needed to address their web of connections. "We needed to focus our attention not on how to increase Sunday morning attendance but on how to strengthen and increase more points of connection for people, which would enable us to better pastor people through life transitions."



## **PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY**

### **Core Values**

A core value is something that is non-negotiable, an unchanging commitment that clarifies and determines key decisions. Establishing core values provides a foundation for the church to be built on and should be compelling, clear, Christ-like, and unique in that it defines our DNA as a church body. These values help to build a mission statement, purpose and identity. The Discovery Team spent time discussing and establishing what is important to Trinity and how that has been lived out. Our priorities have been refined to the broad categories of worship, Christian education, and outreach, but further work is necessary to identify core values upon which they can be based to provide a solid foundation for the church. This should be accomplished as a group so we move forward in unity.

### **Ministry Action Potential Study (MAPS) 2015**

Trinity has been having problems for years and past efforts at strategic planning and gathering ideas from outside sources such as MAPS in 2015 have identified many of the same issues as this Discovery Team, however, these reports have been met with resistance, disregarded or ignored. In their final report, MAPS offered the following insights and recommendations and summarized as follows:

*Trinity's emphasis since its founding has been on building its structure (i.e., buildings, staffing, programs, schools) with some scattering of outreach/missional activities. This is not uncommon for a church. For Trinity to be the church God has called it to be, however, it cannot rest on its past glories. Churches that do so tend to spend their resources on maintenance of these structures even when they are no longer relevant. When this occurs in the life cycle of a church, it leads to decline or eventually death.*

*Trinity has had some "banner" years, but in the recent past has experienced some challenging times.*

*As with many churches, Trinity is now faced with a situation of declining membership, attendance, and giving; an aging congregation; facilities that need maintenance; and debt (some of which has been paid down by the sale of some property). The church has historically tried to attract more people by its programs, music, ministries, and activities at a time when, culturally, people do not come to church – except for activities and programs; however, the church is not set up to connect to the people when they do come.*

*It is important that Trinity consider initiating an overall strategic planning effort with a sense of urgency, importance, and an open mind. God has blessed Trinity with a rich heritage and resources. How can these now be used to be more relevant to the community and to growing God's Kingdom?*

## **PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY**

### **Ministry Action Potential Study (MAPS) 2015**

*This “strategic soul searching” may indicate the need to close old programs, rearrange staff, use the facilities in new and different ways, etc. so new, more relevant ministries to and in the community (versus in the church) can be started. Trinity needs to be open to God’s Spirit and willing to step out and undertake the [sometimes risky] endeavors that God lays on its heart.*

MAPS offered specific recommendations with resource ideas that included:

1. Developing an intentional discipleship process;
2. Developing a “first-time” guest follow-up process;
3. Becoming a more missional church;
4. Increased emphasis on financial stewardship referring back to creating an intentional discipleship process;
5. Addressing the school / church finances;
6. Improve the timeliness and accuracy of entering data into the Mission Vital Signs data; and
7. Organize to connect people’s assets with the needs of the community.

Although the MAPS study was conducted and reported in 2015, these same issues and recommendations remain relevant today. Questions remain as to why this study (and others initiated by previous pastors) was set aside and what were the hindrances to implementing the proposed solutions.

### **Trinity Christian School**

According to their mission statement, Trinity Christian School of Palm Beach Gardens provides Christian education that shares Christ’s word in a loving, family-oriented environment that nurtures academic excellence, enhances self-esteem, and builds social responsibility for the complete development of each child as a unique creation of God. What began as a preschool over thirty years ago, eventually grew to an elementary school. Finally, the goal of having a school that functioned through 8th grade was realized in the 2015-2016 school year.

TCS uses many of the facilities on the campus. The preschool occupies the “Mary Roos” building as well as some of the Fellowship Hall building and connecting building between the two. For the use of campus space outside of the Erbey Center, the school pays rent to the church. The school also pays the mortgage, utilities, and maintenance on the Erbey Center. The school expects to begin paying rent on the Children’s Ministry wing as well as the Youth center this school year.

## **PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY**

### **Trinity Christian School**

TCS is a ministry of Trinity UMC and part of the Trinity Community. Although the church had to help support the school along the way, it is now stable without additional financial assistance from Trinity UMC. The school maintains high Christian standards for all students and faculty and has won several awards over the years for excellence. It is accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International, the United Methodist Association of Preschools, and the State of Florida Health Department. Class sizes remain small but there is a waiting list for some grade levels.

Although the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are unknown, as a part of the Trinity Community, TCS is successfully growing and financially stable. Since TCS is a smaller school, they are able to put forth the necessary safety procedures to allow in-class instruction in the 2020-21 school year, which has drawn more people to inquire about enrollment. Since the public school's decision to start the school year virtually, many parents have reached out to enroll their students at TCS. Although it is a private school, TCS has endeavored to maintain a lower tuition rate than other schools in the area, to allow more families to be able to afford the Christian education that the school provides. If these families will remain in the school long term is a valid question, however, it at least gives TCS a year to engage students in Christian education.

Over the past three years, the Youth Group at Trinity UMC has seen some benefits from attendance by TCS students. During the 2019-20 school year, approximately two-thirds of the Middle School youth group was comprised of students who stayed after school to participate. While this has not necessarily translated to their families fully engaging in the life of Trinity UMC, it is a good start. Ms. Martial, Principal, and Ms. Maione, Assistant Principal, presented to this Discovery Team ideas for school growth as well as for participation by the Trinity Community. We consider a more intentional focused effort on the part of the church to be missional towards the school. The mission field is right on our campus where the Trinity Community can have a direct impact.

### **Florida Conference and Atlantic Central District Discussions**

A teleconference with Rev. Alex Shanks, Assistant to the Bishop with the Florida Conference, and Rev. Dionne Hammond, Atlantic Central District Superintendent with our DT and Board of Trustees was held and summarized as follows:

- Decline is a reality in most of our churches who will have to innovate and adapt into the future. Trinity's worship attendance declined by 22% since 2011, which is in line with the Florida Conference decline.
- In the Florida Conference, Trinity is in the top 100 churches for membership and top 90 in terms of worship attendance, and within the top 20 in both categories in the Atlantic Central District.

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Florida Conference and Atlantic Central District Discussions

- Trinity is viewed as valuable to the Conference and worthy of sustaining. The following recommendations were offered:
  - 1: Focus All Efforts on Revitalization  
Focus on increase in engagement and connection to Unstuck Group as a resource. Coaching and support from the District and Conference. Consider and implement leadership training to raise up a new generation of leaders.
  - 2: Explore Adoption by another UMC  
Consider being adopted or merged by a currently successful UMC such as Community of Hope.
- There was further discussion about how Trinity might leave the United Methodist Church and have Christ Fellowship, a local non-denominational church, partner with Trinity. Further discussion on this topic follows.

The United Methodist denomination is currently at a crossroads due to doctrinal issues regarding human sexuality with changes originally to be voted on in May 2020, but now delayed to August-September 2021 due to the impacts of COVID-19. Currently, a Letter of Understanding is in place for Christ Fellowship, a healthy and successful nondenominational church that is seen as having the financial resources to maintain and improve Trinity's facilities, grow the congregation, and take over its care while remaining conservative in their views on human sexuality. A group of Trinity's congregation, known as Kingdom Partners (KP), have strongly expressed their desire for Trinity to go with Christ Fellowship. They are tired of trying to maintain Trinity's older facilities, are distressed at the general decline of the church, and do not trust the General Conference regarding decisions to be voted on that could possibly change UMC doctrine and Book of Discipline. This KP group sees a partnership with Christ Fellowship as the best answer to Trinity's problems.

Rev. Alex Shanks and Rev. Dionne Hammond have clarified and outlined the current avenues for a local church leaving the UMC, briefly summarized as follows:

- A. Two avenues for a local church leaving the UMC currently, both with detailed requirements:
  - ¶2553, a provision of the UMC regarding the disaffiliation of a local church over issues related to human sexuality, can only be used for reasons of conscience regarding the current stance on the LGBTQ issue. This paragraph can be read in its entirety at <http://calms2019.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=66>

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Florida Conference and Atlantic Central District Discussions

- Close the church and school, according to ¶2549, and return the property to the conference. The Conference would be entitled to do what they wish with the property, but one option may be to appraise, and then possibly negotiate a buy-back or sale to another entity, however, we have been told that the Conference would like a United Methodist presence in the area, so those options are unlikely. This paragraph from the Book of Discipline can be viewed in its entirety at [Book of Discipline: ¶ 2549. Disposition of Property of a Closed Local Church](#)

B. Three avenues for the local church leaving the UMC if the Protocol passes in 2021, each with detailed requirements:

- Unite with a new expression of Methodism.
- Similar to ¶2553 – Subsection 12 of Legislation
- Close the church and school, according to ¶2549, and return the property to the conference as stated in Option A above.

A follow up meeting with Rev. Dionne Hammond confirmed that the gracious exit that ¶2553 affords to those who have objections to the current stance on the human sexuality issue does not apply to Trinity at this time. According to the Book of Discipline, Section VI. Specific Responsibilities of District Superintendent, ¶419:

*10. The district superintendent shall interpret and decide all questions of Church law and discipline raised by the churches in the district, subject to review by the resident bishop of the annual conference.*

*The Book of Discipline* has not been changed and this issue will not be addressed again until the next General Conference in August-September 2021. The main reason the Kingdom Partners want to leave the denomination for Christ Fellowship originated out of a concern for declining attendance and financial resources in the face of continuing and growing facility needs.

Also, Reverend Hammond confirmed that closing Trinity (invoking the “Trust Clause”) requires returning the church and property to the Annual Conference. Any decisions will then be at the sole discretion of the Conference who have already expressed their desire for retaining a United Methodist presence in Palm Beach Gardens. The United Methodist Church is grace-based and works under the banner of *do no harm* and as such, is diligently working to seek possible pathways for all current UM churches regardless of their standing on doctrine, but this remains fluid with nothing set in concrete. Possibilities are being considered and discussions ongoing but voting will not occur until the next General Conference in 2021 and in the meantime, the *Book of Discipline* remains unchanged.

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Church Revitalization Plan: Ethos, Engage, Empower, Equip!

An example of a revitalization plan outline has been drawn up to show some possibilities of a starting point to build on, ideas to implement, and how new vitality, vision and direction can bring life to a church.

1. First, it is important to have a clear vision and core values to give us purpose, identity, direction, and keep us focused.
2. Engage the services of an outside consulting group to help direct how we can move forward such as the Unstuck Group to keep us accountable with follow through in what they are recommending as it fits into the mission, goals, and strategies of our church.

It is important for the leadership of Trinity UMC, TCS, and the Community Christian Counseling Center to be trained together so that we operate in unity and walk together as one in a discipleship program. According to Ephesians 4:12, disciple making is focused on *“equipping His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* Consider this an apprenticeship to Jesus and make discipleship real discipleship incorporating spiritual disciplines and a missional component. Then, leaders lead by example and are able to give out what they themselves have.

3. Empower the leaders, staff and congregation to create new ways of expressing God’s Love as we operate in a “new normal”. It will be necessary to re-vision how we do church and consider ourselves as having an online church with in-person options. A strong online presence is critical. What can this look like? How can we express community in the life of the church and have a connection with people in an online format? A digital taskforce would be a necessary addition to church ministry. Consider ending Sunday worship with questions that require follow up possibly in a small group, and establish a caring community using small groups based on sermon messages and online devotions. Consider a shepherding ministry to help people during transition periods in their lives, such as from high school to college, which will require a personal investment into individuals.

Look to other successful church processes/systems to incorporate similar strategies into the Trinity Community. It is imperative to have a connection process with online viewers and coaching should be considered to help with accountability as it will be far too easy to give up in this “new normal” way of doing church in unfamiliar territory.

## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Church Revitalization Plan: Ethos, Engage, Empower, Equip!

4. Equip our leaders, staff, and volunteers. Consider leadership development incorporating discipleship training within our entire Trinity Community to include young people, lay leaders, and volunteers. "Recruiting and Retaining Leaders," by Doug Anderson (recommended by MAPS), or some other curriculum may be helpful for empowering volunteers.

Explore See All The People <https://www.seeallthepeople.org>, an organization within the United Methodist Church that has a focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ. They ask, "What would happen if we stopped fixing our church and started seeing all the people Christ calls us to reach?" Let's find out!

5. Develop healthier habits of TUMC and TCS relationships:
  - a. Create a cohesive name for our campus combining Trinity UMC of PBG and Trinity Christian School together on a dashboard in one website,
  - b. Utilize UMAP (United Methodist Association of Preschools) to help drive narrative.
  - c. Engage with other church / school groups for direction and best practices (i.e. Christ Church Ft. Lauderdale, Village School of Naples).
  - d. Establish a clear financial structure between the finances of the church and school. There needs to be consistent reporting of the school's finances to the Finance Committee.
  - e. Develop creative staffing to link the church and school. An example of this would be the "Pastor to School and Families" position at Christ Church. This Pastor spends days at the school teaching Bible classes and interacting with students and families and also organizes Children's Ministry activities on the weekends.
  - f. Developing ways to connect service opportunities between the church and school. For example (not an inclusive list), the church will create consistent opportunities for service during times when school parents can engage. Also, the school can create a master list of items/services where church members can engage.
  - g. Integrate school teachers into the life of the church - encourage some to get involved in one of TUMC's committees (such as trustees, missions, etc).
  - h. Increase or add tuition discounts for contributing church members (regular) to send their students, and for teachers to keep their students at the school. This would also help with teacher retention.
6. Develop a plan to "Right Size" the facilities, programs, and strategies:
  - a. Seek outside professional advice about the nature, structure, and usage of our facilities on an ongoing basis, which will allow us to offer more services to the community and maximize our campus space and in turn enable us to pay our bills and maintain building upkeep.

### **PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY**

#### **Church Revitalization Plan: Ethos, Engage, Empower, Equip!**

- b. Create a prioritized Action Plan for the Board of Trustees to include currently deferred maintenance, ongoing maintenance issues, and capital improvements.
  - c. “Strategic Soul Searching” may indicate the need to close old programs, rearrange staff, use the facilities in new and different ways, etc. so new, more relevant ministries to and in the community can be started (MAPS).
7. Create a Capital Campaign Fundraiser for the school and church. Contact the District regarding literature and resources to help organize a capital campaign as well as other information and ideas about raising funds. Engage the services of a grant writer to find creative ways to get much needed upgrades (ie technology, equipment) for both the church and school. This is even more important as we consider developing and implementing a digital strategy for the church in the “new normal”.

In a recent teleconference, Rev. Dionne Hammond stated some characteristics of Bay Hope Church, a successful UMC in the Tampa area that has undergone revitalization:

- Having a clear mission and clear vision,
- Being “sold out” to introducing people to Jesus,
- Doing whatever it takes,
- Having a heart for the lost,
- Changing their name and not using “UMC” in the new one,
- Making tough decisions regarding finances and worship style,
- Having a 20+-year pastor,
- Salvation messages given at the end of each sermon.

Strategically, revitalization calls for implementing a new way to do church and being very intentional in what we do and why we do it. This necessitates letting go of the old to usher in the new. Henry Cloud in *Necessary Endings* poses questions that Trinity can carefully consider: Can we “see” what needs to be pruned, be motivated by an urgency for a hopeful future, and go to work on what is worth keeping, what is worth fixing, and what should end to make room for a desired future?



## PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY

### Unstuck Group

Another way to see how a revitalization plan can be structured is by the Unstuck Group's Strategic Alignment/Planning Pyramid:



In this diagram, the foundation portion of the pyramid does not change - ever - only the organizational strategies identified as direction and action change. Our core beliefs, mission, and making disciples does not change, but our vision, strategy and structure should always be in flux so as to be relevant to the current culture.

Questions to ask ourselves: Where do Trinity's core values fit into this chart? Are they really core beliefs, or are they just something we profess to believe in? Could they really be priorities and we need to dig deeper to get to the core of what we believe? Are we operating at a level without a base foundation? If we do not have a base foundation upon which to operate, anything we do may fail due to our not being one in our mission. If we don't have clarity on what we are doing and why, then any strategies we want to implement will be ineffective.

## **PHASE 3: CURRENT REALITY**

### **Unstuck Group**

A fundamental change in how we do church is even more necessary in this present COVID-19 era. Couple this with the fact that we are living in a post Christian era that does not see church as relevant, which is especially true of the younger segments of the population that Trinity is currently missing, and the need for change becomes paramount. Christ Fellowship and Community of Hope both attribute their success in part to having a process, or system for new members to be incorporated into the congregation and discipled, while Trinity does not.

The methods and formulas in leading a church congregation that used to be effective simply do not work anymore and revitalization offers a fundamental change in how we view church and our mission from the ground up. However, revitalization is a foreign concept to Trinity, a church that has maintained its brand of doing church for decades without a history of initiating anything as comprehensive as what revitalization will require and will need help to maneuver through such unfamiliar terrain. Consider utilizing an outside resource such as Unstuck Group (<https://theunstuckgroup.com>) to help accomplish any revitalizing effort. The Atlantic Central District is willing to assist Trinity with financial resources.

## PHASE 4: ASSESSMENT

It is helpful to determine where we have been to know who we are now in order to move ahead to where we need to be as the body of Christ. A look at Trinity's history can provide insight.

A successful pastorate begins well, has a fruitful ministry, and ends well with a sense of completion and the pastor leaving with a blessing - unsuccessful pastorates do not. Unfortunately, Trinity has had unsuccessful pastorates over the years. Trinity has a history of frequent pastoral changes, with appointments over the years that lasted from a short duration of two years with the longest at 14 years; however most are in the 5-year range. This revolving door of pastors has not allowed for redefining the mission of the church, future planning, or ministry development as each new pastor ushers in their own style and ideas disrupting what may already be in place. Often during these times it has been unclear where the laity's leadership and pastorate responsibilities begin and end creating a gray area that fluctuates when the church transitions from one pastor to the next. This gap has often been filled with frustration and distrust, sometimes toward the Conference for appointments made and sometimes toward the pastorate position itself. This is a thread that has been woven throughout Trinity's history.

Senior Pastors Appointed to Trinity	
Rev. Robert Brittan	1962-1969
Rev. William Obaugh	1969-1971
Rev. J. Gordon Ralls	1971-1976
Rev. Earle Rabb	1976-1990
Rev. Hugh Lake	1990-1993
Rev. Wayne Speakman	1993-1998
Rev. Dean Whitten	1998-2000
Rev. Clark Pickett	2000-2006
Rev. Durwood Foshee	2006-2011
Rev. John Denmark	2011-2016
Rev. Tim Smiley	2016-current
Associate Pastors	
Rev. William Larrison	1979-1983
Rev. Irvin Price	1983-1987
Rev. Grant Siegfried	1987-1993
Rev. John Winters	1993-1995
Rev. Rick Thompson	1997-2002
Rev. David Broadbent	1992-2000
Rev. Rachel Lever	1998-2002
Rev. John Braden	1995-2006
Rev. Arlindall Burks	2006-2011
Rev. Emily Sterling	2014-2019

During the years of unsuccessful pastorates, a congregation can feel misled, with trust easily broken, especially by pastoral failures. If the resulting trauma has not been successfully resolved, it resonates throughout the life of the church resulting in a lack of trust of any church authority, including the Conference and appointed pastors. We have found this to be true within the Trinity Community.

Trinity has placed a strong emphasis on buildings, staffing, programs, and schools with some scattering of outreach/missional activities since its founding, according to the 2015 MAPS study, but is now faced with declining membership, attendance and giving, an aging congregation and facilities that need maintenance. This is still true today. Questions of available resources (people, finances) and how much time until we reach the point where we cannot sustain ourselves remain at the forefront of any possible pathway option. Any revitalization plan would be a long-term process with tangible results not usually realized until years after implementation, according to Rev. Dionne Hammond. She has agreed to consider the feasibility of this option and have the Florida Conference help to determine Trinity's viability and explore any options available for assistance.

## **PHASE 5: SOLUTION FOCUSED**

Why does Trinity exist? Where is God calling us to go? How are we going to get there?

In the past, there has not been a clear process that Trinity has used to answer these questions. Our goal is to objectively review our current reality and identify a clear path for Trinity's future as a sustainable and viable church.

Complicating our process is the current COVID-19 pandemic, which is anticipated to be an issue for a while; however, it is too soon to know exactly how this will play out and what will be our "new normal". But, even if we are unsure of the future, we believe God will provide a clear path of what we need to do today.

We recognize that Trinity has lost her way due to inconsistent leadership from a revolving door of pastors and poor church leadership. We recognize the disappointment and distrust that exists for church authority that started long ago and still exists today. We recognize the fear of what an unknown future holds and the desire to safely remain as we have always been. We recognize and acknowledge the hurt, betrayal, and frustration that this congregation has suffered over the years and that complete healing has not yet taken place. We recognize those who still mourn the loss of the way Trinity used to be many years ago. We recognize that through a series of major changes, difficulties, and traumas, many Trinity members have lost their confidence and sense of purpose as a community.

We also recognize and acknowledge that the legacy of Trinity began in the pioneering spirit of its founders some 60 years ago who by faith believed that God wanted to establish a United Methodist Church presence in Palm Beach Gardens. Trinity's legacy resides in her people - on those faithful servants who have gone before, who loved and served God, some of whom continue today. It is on their shoulders we stand as a part of the United Methodist Church, a denomination with a broad umbrella that has allowed traditional churches like Trinity to be a part. This is Trinity's legacy.

### **Conclusions**

The Discovery Team's assignment was to help the congregation discern possible pathways for Trinity's future as a sustainable and viable church. After much work, study, prayer, listening for the voice of God and seeking His wisdom, the following are our conclusions.

Although a possible pathway was initially thought to be a Christ Fellowship partnership, our research has determined this is not currently viable due to:

- Disaffiliation utilizing ¶2553 is not applicable to Trinity, according to Rev. Dionne Hammond, as it originated out of a concern for declining attendance and financial resources in the face of continuing and growing facility needs.

## PHASE 5: SOLUTION FOCUSED

### Conclusions

According to the Book of Discipline, Section VI. Specific Responsibilities of District Superintendent, ¶419:

*10. The district superintendent shall interpret and decide all questions of Church law and discipline raised by the churches in the district, subject to review by the resident bishop of the annual conference.*

- The Conference has stated their desire to keep a United Methodist Church presence in Palm Beach Gardens so closing the church and returning the property to the Annual Conference with the remote hope of a buy-back is not feasible.
- Any further hope for Trinity's disaffiliation from the UMC by challenging these reasons will likely require a lengthy, expensive, drawn-out legal process that Trinity is not in a position to pursue.

We could consider doing nothing and sit tight until the General Conference convenes next year to see what decisions will be enacted and what possibilities for disaffiliation may be presented at that time. It would be important to re-analyze our church's status after the General Conference next year to see where we stand pending those decisions. However, much can change as there continues to be further refining of possible solutions to the complicated issues at hand with uncertainty looking so far into next year. In the meantime, focused attention to this end only takes away from the mission of the church.

According to Matthew 28:19, we have a commission "as you are going" to *be* the church. What does this look like? Who will teach about Jesus so that not only today's but tomorrow's generation will come to know Christ and be fully equipped to proclaim the Good News for themselves if we don't? There are now generations of young people who are unchurched and far from God. This calling is for today - not tomorrow or next year. What about the lost, the hurt, and those suffering? What is our responsibility to them? "Whom shall I send?", the hymn "Here I AM, Lord," asks. How shall we answer? "Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart."

The question remains for us, can our Trinity Community rediscover its purpose? Can we move past the trauma and learn to regain trust in each other, our leadership, and the Conference? Can we make the hard choices that allow us to thrive in the new normal? Revitalization calls for a reactivation of a heart in mission with God - a rebirth and a renewal.

A revitalization pathway includes a planned, dedicated long-term effort to infuse increased vitality and sustainability into our current church community. See page 19 for an example of the possibilities a Revitalization Plan could include, however, it is a process that would need to unfold under the guidance of an outside resource such as the Unstuck Group (see page 22).

## **PHASE 5: SOLUTION FOCUSED**

### **Conclusions**

#### PROS

1. Re-establish Trinity's identity and core values, and proclaim that we are recommitting ourselves to Trinity's mission and its future under the Lordship of Jesus
2. Recommitting to be stewards of Trinity's heritage, community and property
3. Can start the process immediately
4. UMC agreement to provide expertise, leadership continuity, and some financial support
5. Will add a new level of energy and excitement as we move forward in mission with God

#### CHALLENGES

1. Similar efforts aimed at revitalization were made in the past but failed as the studies were done, but recommendations not implemented
2. Will require expertise and a dedicated, persistent core of leaders and volunteers
3. Does not rectify current facility needs or potential financial threats in the short term
4. Possible dissension/skepticism from within the Trinity Community will require healing, buy-in, and unity
5. Current COVID-19 prevention measures have disrupted church gatherings and present a challenge as we move forward

The Revitalization Pathway is a recommitment to be stewards of the church's heritage, its future, its community, and its property but questions remain as to available resources and the long-term success of this pathway.

This pathway would require a vote of acceptance or adoption from the CLC in order to move forward, but not necessarily a vote by the entire church membership, although it is highly recommended.

## **PHASE 5: SOLUTION FOCUSED**

### **Recommendations**

Any possible option should be selected only after a dedicated period of prayer and discernment. We are mindful that Trinity's history has shown that past decisions have been rushed or not inclusive of all members of the church. To this end, the Discovery Team is recommending a 60-day period of prayer for discernment in seeking God's will for Trinity's future. During this time the Discovery Team will make itself available to discuss our findings or answer questions.

Following a dedicated period of prayer and discernment, the Discovery Team recommends the Church Leadership Council (CLC) vote on developing and pursuing a Church Revitalization Pathway that includes a thorough yet attainable plan, dedicated resources (both financial and personnel), and leadership continuity and commitment.

It is the Discovery Team's ardent prayer that together, we will seek our first love, Jesus, repent, forgive and be forgiven, and ask the Lord to heal our church. We want all to be in deep prayer for the mind of Christ as we think, speak, act, and decide. If we as a Community can look at Trinity and the unreached world around us with fresh eyes, through the eyes of Christ, then we can walk in unity and surety with Him.

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of All, who is over all and through all and in all. - Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV)*

### **RESOURCES AND QUESTIONS**

You can find a copy of this report, as well as other important documents and links, on the church website at [www.trinitypbg.org/discoveryteam](http://www.trinitypbg.org/discoveryteam). The Discovery Team will also be hosting multiple Online Conversations throughout the month of August that will take place in a small group setting. You can see the list of dates and times and sign up at the link above.

Please direct any questions that you may have about the report to [asktrinity@trinitypbg.org](mailto:asktrinity@trinitypbg.org). We will be reviewing emails on a weekly basis, so please allow us ample time as we respond to the best of our ability.