



## SUMMARY REPORT

*Alta Woods Visioning Session 1*  
*The A2 Assessment*  
*Other Church Assessment Materials*  
*Pastoral Observations*

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**March 31, 2007**

### INTRODUCTION

“David, we want you to go to Alta Woods.” That was the moment; those were the words. Those were the words from District Superintendent Willis Britt that got me immediately thinking about the Alta Woods Church – its history, its pastors, its context, its future. I knew much of the history and had even experienced the church in its “hey day.” I knew many of the pastors personally and held them in high esteem. I had known the context through personal acquaintances through the years and knew the current challenges of the surrounding community. And I knew of the concerns about Alta Woods’ future – a changing community, an anxious membership. What I didn’t know was what lay ahead. I knew that finding the future would take more work – hindsight is always easier than foresight. Looking backward is always easier than looking ahead. I also knew that finding that future would take a lot of listening, observing, and exploring, and not just in the church, but also in the community.

What I didn’t really know was the current membership, and I was thrilled by what I experienced as I arrived – a committed, active group that was still seeking, still dreaming, still hoping. But they were also feeling a little fearful, sounding a bit anxious, and they were looking for leadership. Previous pastors had helped them move through some of the issues in significant ways, *but what could I do?* Could I help? Could *anybody* help?

I remembered what was a life-changing quote for me – “The system is designed for the results that you are getting; if you want to change the results, you have to change the system.” That is, all the things that are in place – ministries, committees, processes, attitudes, history, people, leadership, context – all of these things have combined to

produce what we have now. And if we like what we are experiencing, then we can rock along just like we have been. But if we *aren't* satisfied with where we are, then we must make some changes in order to produce a different result.

What I discovered in six months of listening, observing, and exploring was that there was not a clear consensus in the congregation about the future of Alta Woods. Some indicated that they were here to stay until they died or until the doors were closed for the last time. Some indicated that they would hang around until certain circumstances changed. Some were enthusiastic about the emerging outreach ministry of the church and were committed to making it work. But none seemed to be finding a way to do much more other than to “keep plugging along until things fell apart.” In hearing so many different ideas and forecasts, I began to feel that it was time for the church to take a *proactive approach*, to be a part of forming its future, and maybe even the community's future, *in a way that made sense to the membership*, instead of “waiting for the roof to cave in.”

A convergence of events and resources has come together to create this window of opportunity for the Alta Woods Church AND to assist me in this process:

1. My previous experience in master planning, particularly related to Camp Lake Stephens, is proving most helpful.
2. Becoming involved as a consultant with Youth Ministry Architects in Nashville, TN, led by Mark DeVries, has put me in touch with additional concepts and resources, many of which are incorporated in the format of this document and will continue to show up throughout the process I'm sure.
3. The annual conference instituted an evaluative process called The A2 Assessment emerging from descriptions of the Early Church in the second chapter of Acts. Completing the first phase of the A2 Assessment helped the Administrative Council to look at its current situation.
4. The annual conference and district are well aware of the Alta Woods situation and are looking to “do something” in the South Jackson area beginning with a projected new appointment in the area in June, 2008.
5. The community is just as anxious as the church is, and civic leadership is struggling in its response.
6. *THE CHURCH IS READY* and is enthusiastic about “taking this bull by the horns.” Whatever the outcome of the process, the membership will feel better about choosing its own path under God's guidance and being a part of determining its own future.
7. And I am *thrilled* to be a part of what God is going to do at and through Alta Woods Church. This will be a remarkable adventure, and it will be a *holy* adventure. But that's something that God seems pretty good at doing – taking His people on new adventures. I can't wait to see what this Promised Land looks like!

David W. Carroll

## **BACKGROUND**

Alta Woods United Methodist Church is a 53-year-old congregation located on the south side of Jackson, MS. on approximately three acres just south of Interstate 20 and on the southwest corner of Alta Woods Boulevard and Terry Road. Church members describe their church family as a welcoming, loving, yet aging fellowship that is dedicated to the work of God, especially outreach work, and that is seeking the vision that God has for them in their current circumstance.

The church was started in 1953 as a new church intended to serve the surrounding Alta Woods neighborhood and South Jackson area. The church peaked at a membership of approximately 1400 around the year 1990 as the area began a period of decline. Some church members chose to leave the area and relocate to other parts of Metro Jackson, as did some of the local businesses.

The church explored the possibility of relocating in the years 2000-01 and decided to stay at the current location and minister to the surrounding community. The result has been a strong emphasis on missional outreach and the development of several excellent ministries to the poor. One person described the church with “sleeves rolled up to work whenever and wherever we are needed.”

At the same time the supporting congregation has continued to decline in numbers, and the church has had little success in attracting new families, particularly young families with children and youth. Other nearby United Methodist congregations have fared even worse.

The statistically reported membership of the church is approximately 835 (although the church leadership realistically estimates the number to be well below that) and, on an average week, 150 people attend one of the church’s two worship services. The worship attendance actually increased in 2006, largely due to the increase in attendance at Gravy & Grace, the church’s worship service targeting the homeless.

The Gravy & Grace worship style is modern in nature and incorporates the homeless participants as musicians and witnesses in the service. It is driven by a group of volunteers who are committed to that ministry and to the people it serves. The 11:00 Worship Service is traditional in nature yet attempts are made to incorporate some influences of the Emmaus/Cursillo movement, particularly through music, which the congregation seems to enjoy.

There is no doubt that the strength of the church’s ministry is in the area of missions. While the church has sponsored the weekly Thrift Shoppe for many years, the development of the Gravy & Grace ministry in 2003 solidified the church’s focus following the decision to stay at the current address, and gave impetus to the development of related ministries. The addition of the Snack Pack ministry, which now distributes over 3000 snack lunches annually; the Food Bank, which is connected to the

Mississippi Food Network; the 2005 alignment with the Susanna Wesley Foundation for funding support; and the 2006 opening of the Craft House medical ministry have combined to further the church's outreach, focus its mission, and create a new niche within the community.

Other strong areas of the church's ministry include the music ministry, the 60 Plus Ministry, and the long-established fellowship ties within the congregation, primarily expressed in the Sunday School and other remnants of long-term ministries within the church such as United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men, though these last two have only recently been re-constituted.

The music ministry has a long tradition and maintains a high level of quality, continuing to attract the necessary "critical mass" of people needed to sustain that high level on a weekly basis. And though the choir is dependent from time to time on funded interns or upon short-term recruits for special programs, it should continue to provide excellent "connective tissue" for the church's worship.

The 60 Plus Ministry is a long-standing group of senior adults drawn from various churches in the South Jackson area, even from other Metro Jackson areas. The group has strong traditions and formalized processes which serve the group well. About 1/6 of the group comes from Alta Woods UMC, and this number could be much higher.

The fellowship ties within the congregation are a large part of what holds this church together. One person shared, "Alta Woods is just like going home. It is so good that it is hard to break away. Alta Woods is home to me." Another described the church as "an enduring family." This fellowship is largely nurtured in the adult Sunday School and is further strengthened by the Wednesday night Bible study and small group opportunities. Despite the strong fellowship, which can create difficult barriers for newcomers, the church has kept a warm and welcoming spirit and embraces new friends readily.

However, the church has a recent history of struggle in its ministries with youth and children and has been unable to maintain a "critical mass" of youngsters, especially with children. While new pastor David Carroll initiated "stop gap" measures soon after his arrival during the summer of 2006, and there is currently an excellent young youth staff in place, there is a critical need for attention in these areas if the church is to survive.

While the church received general funds totaling \$267,870 in 2006, the first stewardship campaign in a number of years yielded anticipated receipts to support the church's 2007 budget of \$297,880. This includes a program budget of \$13,170 (4.4%), an office budget of \$12,650 (4.2%), a property budget of \$74,200 (24.9%), a staff budget of \$167,519 (56.2%), and 40% of the church's apportionments totaling \$30,341 (10.2%).

It is estimated that 60% of the worshipping 11:00 congregation is regularly involved in volunteer work on behalf of the church, from administrative committee work to hands-on ministry with the homeless. It is an "energized" and "dedicated" congregation, however,

there is some sense of burnout in the undercurrent of the congregation, especially among leaders who have served in positions for a long period of time.

### **WHY A LONG-RANGE PROCESS?**

In light of the anxiety about the church's (and community's) future and feeling the need to be proactive rather than reactive, Reverend Carroll approached the church Administrative Council about embarking upon a long-range process that would enable the church to move strategically forward by helping it to:

- assess the current situation
- address the current pressure points that are impeding effective ministry
- establish the church's identity, mission, and values;
- establish goals for the church's ongoing ministry;
- project the necessary organization, leadership, facilities, staffing, and funding for accomplishing the congregation's ministry goals;
- converse with community, conference, and church entities that may influence or be affected by the Alta Woods Church ministry in the future

Reverend Carroll led the Administrative Council in the first of two visioning sessions on March 11, 2007, to listen to the council's hopes, dreams, observations, and fears. He then combined the results of that first session with the results of the A2 Assessment prepared for the 2006 Charge Conference and with other church assessment materials, as well as his own observations. What follows are the findings gleaned from that work along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

## IS THE CHURCH “PAYING THE RENT”?

Using a phrase coined by Mark DeVries of Youth Ministry Architects, one way to express the effectiveness of the church’s ministry is through the idea of “paying the rent.” Churches that “pay the rent” are meeting the most immediate evaluative expectations of the church’s membership, the surrounding community, and the connectional church. And churches that “pay the rent” have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Churches that are not “paying the rent” often find themselves bogged down, lacking direction, lost in traditions, and typically uninspired. One might say, “Well, aren’t we just paying rent to ourselves?” or “Aren’t we ourselves responsible for whether or not the church is ‘paying its rent’?” Actually, both are true – the whole church is responsible for making sure the rent gets paid AND the whole church receives the benefits!

### PAYING RENT WITH THE MEMBERSHIP

Rent #1: SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT AND PERSONAL NURTURE – Church members want to feel that they have the opportunity to receive inspiration and spiritual nurture to prepare them for daily living and to prepare them for service in the church and world. They want to feel that they are “fed.” They also want to feel that they are cared for and loved.

*The group of actively involved Alta Woods members who are regularly participating in the life of the congregation seem to feel that this is true.*

Rent #2: PEOPLE NUMBERS—Space that the church uses for its ministry should feel “comfortably full,” and the church should establish goals for participation in worship, Sunday School, and other ministry programs. It is important for these target numbers to be clearly agreed upon by the Administrative Council and the staff and that these numbers be used as targets for the whole church, not as a weapon to disparage responsible committees or staff.

*Currently the congregation has no goals nor plan for increasing participation in any church program; the result – lots of “empty timber.”*

Rent #3: FISCAL NUMBERS—This does not necessarily mean that the church has money in the bank and is debt free, but rather means that the church is not shackled by fiscal restraints and has a fiscal plan for the future. A church may carry debt and still “pay the rent” if there is a feeling of hopefulness and a responsible plan in place for future financing.

*At present the church is in good fiscal health; but concerns about declining numbers have created anxiousness about the future prospects.*

Rent #4: PROGRAMS—The church leadership needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective programs that give church members “something to talk about.” The resulting “buzz” will circulate amongst all “rent collecting” entities.

*In this area the church will need to focus LESS on “what we used to do” and “what we are supposed to do” and MORE on doing important things well. What will be key is determining what the high priority items are on the program agenda.*

Rent #5: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the staff, volunteers and the members themselves are essential to building trust and maintaining the fellowship ties that are the “sinews of the church.” The unconditional agape love of Christ must permeate the church, as well as a “can do” attitude.

*The congregation seems to be on a positive ebb right now – perhaps we’re still experiencing the “new pastor honeymoon.” Whatever the case, let’s go with it and build on it!*

#### PAYING RENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Rent #1: ENGAGING – “PORT NOT FORT” – The community wants to feel that the church is interested in the community in which it worships and that the church will not simply “garrison” itself behind the church walls. While security will be an ongoing issue for the church itself, the community wants to know that the church is accessible and that the church doors are open TO the community and FOR church members to move out into the community in service.

*Sure, the church has engaged the homeless through Gravy & Grace, but it has not engaged its physical neighbors. It has engaged Lester School, but not the families living in homes around the church. This must change and must involve staff and laity.*

Rent #2: STANDING ALONGSIDE – FOSTERING COMMUNITY COOPERATION – In order to be embraced by the community, the church must show that it is willing to stand alongside its neighbors in dealing with community issues such as beautification, neighborhood relationships, crime, and poverty. This will be a sensitive issue if the community feels that the church is simply composed of outsiders who are “driving in” on Sundays then deserting the community during the week. Relationships with neighbors and with community and governmental agencies will be highly important.

*THIS MAY BE THE MOST CRITICAL AREA OF NEED! The city is suffering; it needs us; and we need the city.*

Rent #3: LOVING AND ACCEPTING – NOT JUDGING – The church’s openness to persons from the surrounding community in accepting ways will be a key. Not only must the church display openness; it must also display an embracing of individuals from the community through outreach and visitor follow-up in the surrounding area and invitations to membership.

*We must define the community that we intend to serve. What is our target area? What is our target population? Many of our members are driving great distances to participate, but do we expect to recruit new members from those areas? OR are we intending to target a specialized population of committed Christians who are interested in being a part of a specialized ministry such as what we are defining at Alta Woods?*

## PAYING RENT WITH THE CONNECTIONAL CHURCH – THE A2 INDICATORS

Paying the rent with connectional entities is currently being assessed through the A2 Indicators, an assessment tool employed during the 2006 Charge Conference season. The church's A2 scores are in parentheses (4 is the highest possible score). The A2 Indicators include assessment in the following areas:

1. Servant Ministries - reaching out to the community (4)
2. Mission Statement and Core Values – formally expressed and clearly communicated (2)
3. Baptisms and Professions of Faith – 5 per year per 100 worshippers (3)
4. Internal Dialogue and Low Levels of Conflict – healthy conflict resolution (4)
5. Pastoral Tenure – longer is better (1)
6. Ministries to Children and Students – excellent and impacting (2)
7. Rising Worship Attendance – 25% increase in last 5 years (1)
8. Giving Units – 30 or more giving units per 100 worshippers (3)
9. Fiscal Development – over-funding its budget and “going the second mile” (2)
10. Connectional Stewardship – paying 100% of apportionments (1)
11. Average Attendee Tenure – an average attendee tenure of 5 years (1)
12. Condition of Facilities – excellent condition and appropriate ministry space (3)

How well the church “pays the rent” with the connectional church will have an impact upon the resources made available to the church from the connection in the form of advantageous pastoral appointments, supportive supervisory involvement, and other resources from conference agencies. The church, its members, and its staff should take an active role in connectional affairs, as well as draw on its resources.

*Strong A2 Indicators are signs of a strong United Methodist church. The annual conference has given us an excellent evaluative tool to use in measuring our effectiveness.*

As the leadership of the church goes about the process of developing its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to “paying the rent.” In this sense, the church faces parallel tasks: building a foundation and infrastructure that will insure the church's future effectiveness *and at the same time*, maintaining a ministry that builds the enthusiasm of the church, its members, the community, and the connection. This year, Alta Woods has the opportunity to do both: successfully revamp its ministry AND create an appropriate infrastructure for sustaining an effective ministry that allows its members and future ministry to thrive.

## WHAT ABOUT THE JONESES? WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OTHER CHURCHES?

As the church leadership steps into this parallel process, it may be helpful to explore where the church falls among some denominational averages and to explore what is happening in other area churches.

### DENOMINATIONAL AVERAGES – WHERE DOES ALTA WOODS LIE?

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP – Alta Woods' membership of 835 is larger than 95% of United Methodist congregations.

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE – Alta Woods' average worship attendance of 150 is larger than 80% of United Methodist congregations.

SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE – Alta Woods' average Sunday School attendance of 70 is larger than 75% of United Methodist congregations.

*While Alta Woods is still among the top 5% of United Methodist churches in size, its worship attendance is lagging well behind. Sunday School participation lags even further. Even with recognizing an inflated membership number, we are still lagging behind in participation figures.*

### OTHER AREA CHURCHES – WHAT ARE THEY EXPERIENCING?

CHURCH	MEMB. 2005	WORSHIP ATTEND. AVG (%)	SUNDAY SCHOOL AVG (%)	2007 BUDGET	BUDG PER MEM	BUDG. PER WORSH.	F-T STAFF EQUIV	STAFF PER MEMB	STAFF PER WORSH	% APP PD	+/- (%) MEMB. 2005
Leavell Woods	159	38 (23.9)	24 (15.1)	92,000	579	2421	1	.0062	.026	23	-11 (-6.9)
Alta Woods	833	147 (17.6)	108 (13.0)	297,000	357	2020	4.25	.0051	.028	34	-26 (-3.1)
Epworth	411	81 (19.7)	52 (12.7)	163,357	397	2017	2	.0049	.025	70	-8 (-1.9)
Christ	5,098	1,659 (32.5)	958 (18.8)	4,900,000	961	2954	45	.0088	.027	100	-92 (-1.8)
Galloway	2,046	646 (31.6)	305 (14.9)	2,136,488	1044	3307	32	.0156	.049	100	-3 (-0.15)
Brandon, 1 <sup>st</sup>	1,327	476 (35.9)	305 (23.0)	1,179,380	889	2478	9	.0068	.019	100	+13 (+0.1)
Broad-Meadow	580	107 (18.4)	70 (12.1)							49	+2 (+0.34)
Clinton, 1 <sup>st</sup>	1,668	540 (32.4)	335 (21.8)	2,224,000	1333	4119	11.25	.0067	.020	100	+29 (+1.7)
Wells	849	420 (49.5)	250 (29.4)	650,216	766	1548	5	.0058	.012	100	+15 (+1.8)
Madison	1,832	547 (29.9)	400 (21.8)	1,357,090	741	2481	15	.0082	.027	100	+50 (+2.7)

*While this is a limited sample of churches from which to draw any conclusions, there are several things to be learned here, and there are several questions that these figures beg to ask.*

- 1. The growing churches display a higher level of participation than do the declining churches. Growing churches average 33% worship participation and 22% Sunday School participation. Declining churches average 25% worship participation and 15% Sunday School participation.*
- 2. The growing churches reflect a 40% higher budget level than the declining churches. This would apply to receipts per member as well as expenditures per member.*
- 3. The growing churches are employing 40% less staff per worshipper than the declining churches. Of course, as a church staff member, this seemed awfully odd to me! But I believe it may indicate a higher lay participation level in the growing churches which may be the key to success! A look at the “number of leaders” in the conference statistical tables may reveal the answer.*
- 4. Context does not seem to be the determinant factor of growth and decline. What surprises did you find reflected in the table?*

*So what is the difference? Why do some churches have a higher level of participation than others? Of course, there are no quick and easy answers, but here are a few questions?*

*Are the growing congregations better paying the rent?*

*Are the growing congregations shepherding more effectively? Keeping better track of their membership?*

*Are the growing congregations' discipleship programs more effective resulting in a higher level of commitment, higher level of participation, higher level of investment?*

*Are the growing congregations more convincing in their vision and/or mission?*

*And are those congregations more “sold” on their vision?*

*If the context is not the reason that congregations are growing or declining, how can we be more effective?*

## SO WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Typically, congregations have responded to similar situations, such as the one in which Alta Woods finds itself, by doing one of the following things:

1. **RELOCATE** – The church, either through pure fear or through strategic design, decides to relocate, targeting the population in a different area. This is often done by churches seeking to maintain a suburban, family-oriented, ethnically homogenous character.
2. **BI-LOCATE** – The church holds on to its former location as a mission station but relocates its worshipping congregation to take advantage of congregational or population shifts.
3. **GET CREATIVE** – The church totally reinvents itself, perhaps establishing itself as a conglomerate of house churches or by re-forming its character and identity.
4. **OLD PLACE, NEW COMMITMENT** – The church remains at its current location and recommits itself to establishing a viable, impacting ministry.
5. **HANG ON AS LONG AS POSSIBLE** – The church likes who it is and what it is doing, and it decides to maintain its character and work until it is no longer deemed possible.
6. **HAVE A FUNERAL** – The church disbands, making way for another congregation or ministry to serve the surrounding community.

## ASSETS

As this long-range process commences, Alta Woods has a number of assets that are working in its favor. While each creates opportunity in itself, these assets combined can provide a fulcrum from which to leverage sustainable ministry and strengths to expand upon.

**Committed cadre of involved members** – The members actively involved in the Alta Woods congregation serve passionately with a high level of commitment. This is lived out time and again in the weekly activity of the congregation.

**Embracement of diversity** – The congregation for the most part has embraced ethnic diversity in the Alta Woods setting, though there is less openness to differences in social class.

**Extraordinary outreach** – The church is well known for its efforts in outreach ministries to the poor, including a thrift shop, medical clinic, daily snack lunch distribution, food bank, benevolent assistance, worship service for the homeless, etc.

**High Investment of active participants** – Active participants in the Alta Woods membership are highly invested in the ministries of the church. And while the church has no formal mission statement or list of core values, the membership “buys into” the church’s current ministry.

**Proactive initiative** – The current leadership environment is encouraging of the proactive direction expressed in this long-range process, and church leaders seem eager to intentionally and strategically look ahead.

**High quality of staff for the investment** – There seems to be a high level of confidence in the church staff as a whole, though there has been 65% turnover in the last year.

**Hunger and thirst** – The congregation displays a high-level of “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” They are eager to grow in their relationships with God

**Window of opportunity** – A confluence of circumstances has seemed to create a window of opportunity that is encouraging the Alta Woods congregation to act upon its future.

**Welcoming environment** – The congregation is truly a friendly and welcoming congregation. Worship and other program visitors often express that they feel positive about their experience with the Alta Woods Church, even if they have visited “by mistake.”

## CHALLENGES

At the same time the church is facing challenges that work to impede the church's ministry. This "floor must be swept," i.e. impediments should be addressed, so that positive ministry can take root and grow.

**Undefined mission and values** – With an undefined mission and value system, the congregation will have difficulty forming and communicating its identity and work.

**Lack of strategic planning** – Currently the congregation has no projected plan for the future and no goals toward which it is striving. The result has been a reactive, survivalist mode related to the church's future, though the congregation has remained faithfully involved in its outreach.

**Lack of measurable markers** – The church currently has no measurable markers by which it is holding itself accountable. How will it know when it is succeeding or failing other than through how people "feel"?

**Programmatic depression** – The church is experiencing a decline in programming, particularly in the areas of children and youth, and some programs that remain appear to be mostly sustained by their traditions within the congregation.

**Volunteer deficit with children/youth** – While there are a few willing volunteers and while the church has been able to call upon students from nearby Millsaps College, there is a dire need for additional volunteers, particularly with children. Current leadership of these ministries will have to make a concerted effort to recruit and equip new volunteers.

**Lack of "critical mass" of children and youth** – Without this critical mass of numbers of children and youth, it is difficult to sustain these age-level ministries. The church will have to address how to more effectively reach out and build the number of young families that it serves.

**Disconnection with the connection** – The congregation's poor history of apportionment payments indicates a lack of investment in the ministry of the United Methodist connection. Unfortunately, this disconnection also lessens the likelihood that the church will benefit from connectional resources.

**Missing marketing** – Currently there seems to be no way in which the church is "getting the word out" about its ministry, though Associate Pastor Eddie Spencer serves as an effective ambassador in the community.

**Crumbling infrastructure** – The church appears to be "crumbling from underneath" – literally and figuratively. Foundational issues in two of the three main buildings and missing key components, such as strategic plans, control documents, discipleship development, and adequate membership records, indicate a need to rebuild in some ways "from the ground up."

**Successful history** – A successful history can be a springboard for further successful ministry, AND YET it can be a stumbling block to creativity and innovation. The church will want to make sure that its successful past does not impede its future.

**Massive assumptions** – The history and traditions of the congregation have generated a high number of assumptions about operations and procedures. Especially with the high level of staff turnover in the last year, effective communications must be maintained in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings.

**Inadequate communication** – While some of these issues are being addressed, the congregation needs to improve its communication and use all resources at its disposal in order to do so, including newsletter, bulletin, web site, phone tree, email, and snail mail communication pieces.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for the next 15 months to get the Alta Woods congregation on a road of focused direction and ministry:

- 1) Reframe the next year (through June, 2008) as a time of direction-setting and infrastructure building for the church's ministry.
- 2) Target August, 2008, as the start date for a ministry that has sufficient infrastructure to provide long-term stability and with the pastoral and program staff spending less time on the front lines and more time building and leading the ministry team.
- 3) Present this report to the Administrative Council, requesting that they endorse a 15-month strategic design process for the church's ministry.
- 4) Under the umbrella of the Administrative Council, establish a one-year, 5-person Strategic Process Team charged with two overarching responsibilities:
  - A) Work with staff and current committees to remove the immediate pressure points:
    - a. IMMEDIATELY BEGIN A CAMPAIGN TO COMMUNICATE THE CHURCH'S MISSION IDENTITY ONCE IT IS ESTABLISHED. Great things are happening at Alta Woods, and people need to know that.
    - b. SECURE AND STABILIZE THE FACILITIES. Persons who come to Alta Woods must feel secure about the environment and good about the condition of the facilities. The Trustees must continue to address building security as well as foundational and roofing problems lest further crumbling in the infrastructure occur.
    - c. COMPLETE THE MEMBERSHIP AUDIT. Already begun by lay volunteers and Church Secretary Cindy Lazich, this will be a vital tool in improving communication within and about the church. How can we "call the sheep by name" if we don't know who they are!
    - d. ADDRESS THE NEED TO ATTRACT FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH. This should include a systematic plan with measurable markers.
    - e. DEVELOP A HIGH-QUALITY, SIGNATURE EVENT THAT REFLECTS THE GOALS AND VALUES OF THE CONGREGATION and that will help engage one of its target populations.
    - f. RECRUIT AND TRAIN ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER LEADERS WITH A FOCUS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH. We must be ready when they arrive!

B) Establish a consensus for the direction of the church's ministry and the creation of its infrastructure, including the completion of the following tasks:

- g. Work in the Administrative Council to ESTABLISH A FORMAL MISSION STATEMENT, LIST OF CORE VALUES, AND THREE-YEAR REVOLVING GOALS. These will influence all of the resulting ministries of the church.
- h. In cooperation with the staff and administrative committees, ESTABLISH VARIOUS CONTROL DOCUMENTS, including an ongoing 18-month Calendar, accurate Membership Rolls, copyright licensing agreements, abuse prevention guidelines, background screening procedures, and a Financial Audit.
- i. Spend a period of three months to DISCUSS THE APPROVED MISSION STATEMENT AND CORE VALUES amongst the congregation. This DEVELOPMENT OF CONGREGATIONAL SPIRIT BEHIND THE CHOSEN DIRECTION will be vital to the accomplishment of the ministry and impetus for the selected path.
- j. Ask a task force to DEVELOP MINISTRY GOALS that reflect the stated mission and values of the Alta Woods Church. These should be accompanied by measurable markers that will help the church assess how it is doing along the way.
- k. Ask the Lay Leadership Committee to submit a proposal to ESTABLISH A PLAN OF ORGANIZATION that reflects requirements of the Discipline and that expresses "form following function." Remember, "the system is designed for the results we are getting."
- l. Also ask the Lay Leadership Committee to INCORPORATE THE NEW STRUCTURE IN ITS NOMINATING PROCEDURES FOR THE COMING YEAR. This should be followed by the development of job descriptions, volunteer recruitment, training, and launch in January, 2008.
- m. TARGET POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER POPULATIONS AND PROGRAMS in the surrounding community, including schools, colleges, and social service arenas in order to build the church's volunteer base.
- n. Determine ways to BUILD ON THE CHURCH'S STRENGTHS, such as taking Gravy & Grace to the next level, e.g. establish a small group ministry following Gravy & Grace worship that addresses the spiritual, emotional, or physical needs of Gravy & Grace

participants; OR plan to add one new element to the outreach ministry each year.

- o. ESTABLISH A TEAM TO DEVELOP A DISCIPLESHIP PLAN for the congregation. This should include an intentional look at what the church is teaching and the curriculum that is being used, as well as an assessment of whether learning is actually taking place.
- p. MAKE COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH A TOP PRIORITY! Currently the church is “hiding its light under a bushel basket.” Let’s get the word out through multiple communication channels and person-to-person contact.
- q. INVITE CONNECTIONAL CHURCH AND COMMUNITY PERSONNEL TO THE TABLE. This will help get the word out about the work of the church, will improve relations with the wider church and community, and will help all involved to know important information about upcoming developments.
- r. INVITE OUTSIDE GROUPS TO MEET AT ALTA WOODS. Being a good host will indicate just how welcoming and accessible the church is.
- s. Ask the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to DEVELOP A STRATEGIC STAFFING PROPOSAL that reflects the mission, values, and program emphases of the congregation. This should include plans for professional development and continuing education for the staff.
- t. Ask the Board of Trustees to EXPLORE LONG-TERM USE OF THE CHURCH’S FACILITIES. How will the church buildings serve the mission over the long haul?
- u. Ask the Finance Committee to EVALUATE FUNDING RESOURCES needed to accomplish the church’s proposed ministry, and to fund the staff and facilities needed to accomplish the church’s goals.

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE**

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 12:00-4:00 - Visioning Session 1 – David

March 31<sup>st</sup> – Completion of David's Summary Report containing background, assets and challenges, and recommendations. Initial draft shared with district and conference.

April - early May - Reflection on the Summary Report by various groups in the church.

May 6<sup>th</sup>, 12:00-3:00 – Visioning Session 2 – Drafting Mission Statement & Core Values

May-June – Strategic Process Team (chooses own chair) works to draft a version of Mission Statement & Core Values for review and approval of Administrative Council

June 10<sup>th</sup> – Administrative Council finalizes Mission Statement & Core Values

Summer

- Development of the spirit to support the Mission Statement & Core Values

- Ministry Program Development team works

- Communications Team works to begin sharing the church's vision & ministry

- Rev. Carroll extends invitation to converse with church & community leaders

- Curriculum Team develops plan for educational settings

September 9<sup>th</sup> – Ministry Program Development report to Administrative Council

September-October - Lay Leadership Committee works on Committee Structure and Volunteer Recruitment – Needs, Willingness, Skills, Length of commitment

October-November - Stewardship Campaign

January & February – Board of Trustees - Exploration of facilities needed

January & February - Staffing proposal is developed by Staff-Parish Relations Comm.

March & April – Finance Committee develops proposal for funding the vision

May – Strategic Process Team drafts Final Report with Goals, Benchmarks, Next Steps

August – Alta Woods Kickoff – new components in place and functioning

## CONCLUSION

The Alta Woods Church is a congregation at the old “fork in the road,” and the direction it chooses now will have a lasting impact on its identity, on its mission, even on its viability as a sustainable congregation. If the process is done well, it should guide the church for the next decade or so and will have farther reaching implications in the wider church and community.

But doing long-range work is a laborious process, and it will test the mettle of the church’s leadership as well as the patience of the congregation. Time and prayer will bring the end result and, at the last, whatever harvest may come. The ultimate goal is to remain faithful to the call of God upon this congregation whether we are called to plant, water, tend, or harvest. And God will honor our faithfulness in His time.

## SUGGESTED READING FOR THE CONGREGATION

*44 Steps Up Off the Plateau*, Lyle Schaller, Abingdon Press  
*Benchmarks of Quality in the Church*, Shawchuck and Rath, Abingdon Press  
*Church Growth*, McGavran and Hunter, Abingdon Press  
*Doing Good Better!*, Stoesz and Raber, Good Books  
*Don’t Shoot the Horse (‘Til You Know How to Drive the Tractor*, Herb Mather,  
Discipleship Resources  
*Effective Church Planning*, Lyle Schaller, Abingdon Press  
*The Local Church Looks to the Future*, Lyle Schaller, Abingdon Press  
*The Once and Future Church*, Loren B. Mead, The Alban Institute  
*Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*, Bill Easum, Abingdon Press  
*Transforming Congregations for the Future*, Loren B. Mead, The Alban Institute  
*Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, Ken Callahan, Harper & Row  
*Visioneering*, Andy Stanley