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There comes a time in the life of every organization where the priority or driving mission, of the organization must be decided. For Henry Ford, that mission was to “build a motor car for the multitude. It shall be large enough for the family, but small enough for the unskilled individual to operate easily and care for, and it shall be light in weight and it may be economical in maintenance.” I believe the Ford motor company has been successful in its mission. It is telling that Ford was the only one of the big three US auto manufacturers that didn’t need the government bailout of 2009. Ford had already done what it had needed to do, by cutting costs and providing the consumer with a product that was economical yet reliable, to survive the economic crisis of the time. Personally, I have found that Fords are the easiest vehicles I have ever had to work on, and for someone who cannot afford to pay a mechanic to fix every problem, that is a blessing. (Insert your own FORD joke here) The bottom line is, Ford Motor Company had a driving mission, and everything they did was based on fulfilling that mission, and it paid off. This working out the mission is what we can call strategic planning. That’s why a mission or priority is so important; it provides an “anchor” point for the strategic planning.

The official mission statement of the United Methodist Church is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” but as Nathan Kirkpatrick, managing director of Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School, has pointed out, “Congregational or institutional mission statements once offered some help in this regard. Unfortunately, many mission statements are now too clichéd, too ambiguous, too broad or too generic to orient our work.” Rather, Kirkpatrick says, we should ask ourselves what difference we feel we are called to make in our community and the world, as the beginning point of strategic planning.

To that end, this month we will be embarking on a process of assessment of our churches’ potential. We are calling it a ministry study. We will be following a process laid out in paragraph 213 of the UMC book of Discipline which states, “ every local church is encouraged to study their congregation’s potential.” According to this paragraph, there shall be formed “a study task force to assist in an extensive study of the past, present, and potential ministry of that local congregation.” In consultation with our lay leaders, Jerry Bower and Paul

McManaway, and church council chairs, Dave Turk and Russ Shannon, we have identified a group of folks we think would be a great fit for this task force, either because of their particular leadership role in the church, or their particular gifts, or their particular demographic, i.e., young parent or older member. As soon as the task force membership is solidified, we will inform the congregation of who is on the task force.

So, what will the task force be studying? There will be eight areas of focus to the study: 1) unique missional opportunities and needs of the community; 2) present ministries of the congregations; 3) number of leaders and style of leadership; 4) growth potential of the surrounding community; 5) fiscal and facilities needs; 6) distance from other United Methodist Churches; 7) number and size of churches of other denominations in the community; 8) other items that may impact the church's ability to fulfill the mission of the Church.

But wait, haven't we done this type of thing before? Yes, Peace and Trinity churches did do a strategic planning evaluation a number of years ago, but it is important to periodically evaluate an organization's strategic plans to make sure they are fulfilling the mission of the organization. I believe it is that time again for Peace and Trinity Churches. As I recently heard one older, long serving pastor in the conference say, to a group of us new pastors, "We (older pastors) ran a church that was geared toward church membership, and not discipleship. That is why we find ourselves in the place we are in now as the church."

The success of Ford Motor Company can be traced back to their ability to reflect upon their mission and make changes to their strategic plans to fulfill that mission. It is now time for us, as Peace and Trinity Churches, to reflect upon our mission, and make strategic plans accordingly, to fulfill that mission. Only then will we be assured, indeed, that we are making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The question we must focus on is "what difference do we feel God is calling us to make in our community and the world?" This ministry study will help us answer that question.

God's Peace and blessings be with you. *Rev. Wiley Gladney*