

Pastor's Corner: 3-30-2019 - Assess – Understanding our Church and our Community

Today for the Pastor's Corner I have shared the summary and conclusions reached by the participants of the Assess Workshop last Sabbath. At the workshop we attempted to construct a timeline of our church's involvement with the community. We wanted to try and identify trends and turning points in our history. The purpose of this exercise was to help us better understand where we have successfully engaged our community in the past as well as to gain insight into how we could do better.

I appreciate all those who attended the Assess Workshop and would like to encourage **EVERY MEMBER OF THE BISMARCK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH** to attend the Advance Workshop scheduled for April 27. Yes, it is important enough to require **bolding**, *italicizing*, underlining, and ALL CAPS. At the end of the Advance Workshop we will formulate a plan for our church to advance God's kingdom by serving in a specific area of our community. We need everybody's input to get this right! The church exists for this very purpose (see the Great Commission of mt 18:18-20). It's time to get off the fence and engage in the process.

Assess Workshop Summary

The Bismarck SDA Church mission journey has traditionally been geared towards the purpose of evangelism and community awareness. In the 1980's and 1990's the church was inwardly focused on the church school, Pathfinders, social gatherings for sports, or musical group concerts for church people.

For a period of 5 years from 2009 – 2014 there was an increase in community mission projects, including a fundraising concert for the Sanctuary House, Bags of Love for abused children, clothing drives for kids, serving meals at Ruth Meier's House and the Banquet. During the 2011 flood, church members assisted with sandbagging and relocating individuals.

The church has had no major conflicts with the community or legal actions taken against it which would have darkened its reputation. It was, however, the opinion of the Assess Workshop participants that the church is essentially invisible within the community due to the lack of involvement with the neighborhood.

There were two major turning points identified in the history of the church. The first was in the 1980's when the Bismarck SDA Church divided into two groups, leading to the start of the Mandan SDA Church. This division was not viewed as a result of dissention, but rather from the church membership outgrowing the building size. The second major turning point was in 2014, with an internal division related to doctrinal issues. This resulted in approximately 20 members meeting in an alternate location or transferring their memberships to other churches.

The most important insights learned through this Assess exercise are:

- We care about children.
- We are concerned about our health and sharing how others can live a healthier lifestyle.
- Our mission efforts have been to volunteer for other organizations' projects.
- We are more comfortable giving "things" than "ourselves".
- When the community is in crisis, we jump to action.
- When asked we respond, but tend to not seek out ministry opportunities.
- Our projects have been short-term with no long-term projects.
- Short-term projects are typically for individuals and not community driven.
- When we work alone, we run out of energy.
- When there is internal strife there is less outward mission activity.

Our mission field is Bismarck, ND. Sixty-eight percent of Bismarck's population has some college to graduate education while 25% have only completed high school. In contrast, 92% of the Bismarck SDA Church members have some college to graduate education with 8% having only a high school diploma. While the community has more individuals in the 20-40 age bracket, the church has more individuals in the 50-70 age bracket. Finally, there are more unmarried in the community than in the church where 75% are married.

The Missional Leadership Team (MLT) interviewed community leaders regarding community needs. These leaders expressed the following concerns: alcoholism, mental health issues, drug use, homelessness and loneliness. When asked, they expressed that potential barriers for our church's involvement with the community include differences in age and educational status. Additionally, partnering with community organizations may be difficult due to confidentiality, screening, or time of day needs.

The biggest opportunity for mission impact is to reach people who are similar to us. The largest cohort in our congregation consists of white ND natives over the age of 50 who are mostly married, conservative, traditional, and with grandchildren. The second largest group is more culturally diverse, age 20-40, who are somewhat less conservative and more flexible, educated, and having younger children. These are the types of people we should be focusing on.

Happy Sabbath,
Pastor Tyler