



Missional Church Consultation Initiative

*Richfield United Methodist
Church*

Minneapolis, Minnesota

October 14, 2021



*The Minnesota Conference MCCI Team would like to thank Pastor Nate Melcher and the leadership of Richfield UMC for the hospitality on your MCCI Express Day and for the privilege of teaming with you. Our prayer is that God will use this process to focus and maximize your congregation's fruitfulness for Christ. Richfield UMC embodies resources and **strengths** ideally suited for next-level transformational ministry, as well as **concerns** that need to be addressed in order for the church to move forward.*

Strengths

1. Welcoming, Friendly Congregation.

Richfield holds a long-time commitment to **welcoming all persons** with open arms and open hearts. The MCCI Team heard stories of the close relationships among church members, some through many years of attending and serving together in the life of the congregation. A major strength of Richfield has been and is the **giving, generous spirit of friendship and support** when anyone has a life crisis, grief, a transition, an illness, a celebration or other time when presence, food and assistance are needed. The **Breakthrough Prayer Initiative** that's taken hold throughout the membership and the Sanctuary's frequently-lit "conflux candles" are evidence that a faith-filled, spiritual motivation is at the congregation's core.

2. Church Campus Facility.

Many members named the **expansive church building and its location** as an asset for both present and potential ministry activities. The Sanctuary, fellowship hall and library were all mentioned as favorite areas, as well as the downstairs that houses the Caring for Children Early Learning Center (CFC).

3. Pastor and Staff.

Pastor Nate's energy, relatability to all ages, sense of humor, technical capabilities and gifted preaching are all reasons given for naming him a major strength of Richfield. **The clergy team and staff** were affirmed for their hours of dedicated investment throughout the life of the church. **Kay Bergeland**, as Parish Nurse, is deeply appreciated for her leadership of the **caring ministry** that connects and supports the congregation (especially through the pandemic season). The **music program** (organ, vocalists, musicians) was noted by many as one of the best things about Richfield.

4. Caring for Children Early Learning Center (CFC).

The MCCI Team was told repeatedly that a wonderful expression of Richfield's prioritization of children and their families is the vibrant and well-established CFC Early Learning Center led by director **Kathy Newbauer**. During the pandemic, the CFC remained open to serve the children of essential workers living in the church's immediate community, which was an incredible gift to those dedicated to "front line" work. The CFC also provides Richfield a valuable **financial revenue stream** that helps underwrite the operations and ministries of the church.



5. Reconciliation, Social Justice and Openness to Differing Views.

The congregation views its mission statement, “for all people to be able to live in faith, justice and joy,” as the driving force behind its decisions to be a **Reconciling Congregation**, address issues of **social justice** and ensure that Richfield UMC maintains an environment in which **differing views** are not only tolerated but appreciated. The longstanding God’s Hands Thrift Store ministry, Beacon Interfaith “Families Moving Forward” program involvement, the Richfield UMC Land Acknowledgement and many other efforts provide tangible evidence of this congregational strength.

Concerns

1. Aging Building.

The Richfield campus increasingly requires ongoing **attention and maintenance**, all of which demands the time and financial investment of the membership. **Significant capacity exists** in the building for new ministry or community use in upstairs vacant rooms and little-used spaces. Concern regarding the building’s expensive present and future care as well as its potential future space usage was mentioned repeatedly during the MCCI Express Day.

2. Aging Congregation.

A concern expressed repeatedly was the observation that the **church is growing older**, and that numerous key longtime leaders have now passed on. Members noted that **few new young families with children** are appearing in Sunday worship services. Also, while diversity is a Richfield value, it was often pointed out that **limited diversity** is evidenced across the church in general.

3. Shrinking Congregation.

Members and leaders expressed concern that the church has seen a trend over recent years of **attendance decline**. While some members have returned to live worship attendance during this phase of the pandemic, others continue to attend online or else seem to have completely disconnected. On occasions when Richfield does welcome new visitors to worship, there is **no robust, intentional strategy or process** in place for inviting them back and proactively connecting them into the life of the church. Although many new visitors attend Trunk or Treat, the Easter Egg Hunt and other standalone church events, few connect further into Richfield involvement.

4. Lack of Congregational Connection to the CFC.

Repeatedly, the MCCI Team heard both members and leaders commenting that the CFC is a ministry of which they are proud, since ministry with children and their families is a priority. Yet the MCCI Team heard significant concern that **more energy could be put into welcoming and integrating the CFC teachers/staff, children and their parents** into the life of Richfield UMC.



5. Scattered Focus and Energy.

A frequently described concern was that while Richfield has a number of ministry efforts underway, no one collective, uniting current **signature ministry** has been identified by the church around which the entire congregation's enthusiasm and energy can rally to create an impact beyond the church walls.

Prescriptions

1. Our Campus: Welcoming to All People.

In response to the concerns about the care and maintenance of the church facility and its potential usage, upon acceptance of this report Pastor Nate and the Administrative Board (assisted by a team-creating process provided by the MCCI) will assemble and commission the following two new teams by or before **January 3, 2022**.

A **Facility Repurpose/Utilization Team** will assume the responsibility of researching and exploring **potential exciting new options** for leveraging the empty rooms and spaces of the facility for missional community purposes, and create a report and proposal to bring to the Administrative Board by or before **August 2022**. The MCCI will provide a prescription coach to help inform and guide the team's work. Example ideas for the team to consider might include (but are not limited to) potentially connecting Richfield's upstairs to user groups such as the Minnesota Conference for office space, creating an eclectic "City Center" of shop vendors in those spaces, utilizing spaces for local social service agencies as adjacent office areas for customer convenience, transforming the extra space into a summer mission trips hub, and so on. The goal would be to provide Richfield UMC with a relevant **new go-to presence** in its community for missional impact and community good.

A **Campus Revitalization Strategy Team** consisting of at least two trustees committee representatives, two finance committee representatives and two additional church members will be advised by an MCCI prescription coach to accomplish the following work:

- Create a **five-year strategic forecast timeline** that will serve as a guide for church leadership as far as anticipating both urgent and future maintenance and other needs of the Richfield campus, including estimates of costs for each maintenance or revitalization project. This strategic forecast timeline should be completed and ready to be provided to the Administrative Board for review and confirmation by or before **September 2022**. The timeline will become a roadmap the church leadership can use to anticipate and prepare for the dollars that will be needed at each point.
- Assume responsibility for investigating the feasibility of a future **capital campaign** to underwrite the maintenance and projects on the timeline, including the **potential addition of an elevator** so that Richfield can truly honor its commitment to "welcoming all people" by ensuring the campus is fully accessible. The team should be prepared to bring the capital campaign feasibility study findings to the Administrative Board by or before **September 2022** for review and potential decision.
- The Campus Revitalization Strategy Team, Pastor Nate and other church leaders will be invited to attend the MCCI **Growing Generous Givers Team Training** that will be offered via Zoom during the next few months. This will enhance leadership's collective skills and approach to discipling the congregation regarding its material resources, helping members grow in their financial generosity.



2. Hospitality Strategy Refresh—for Newcomer Connections That Last.

Upon acceptance of this report, Pastor Nate and the Administrative Board will assemble a new **Guest Connections Team** by or before **January 2022**. It may include those already serving on usher and greeter teams, but must also include **additional new members or attendees** (to add “fresh eyes” to the team). A prescription coach will be provided to partner with the new Guest Connections Team for training and guidance on the following and more:

- How to stage welcoming initiatives for newcomers, from the parking lot to the pew, and back to the parking lot again, so that every person feels the love of this congregation at every point (continuing to honor social distancing as needed).
- Best new practices for follow-up, so this team can build effective systems to ensure newcomers feel included and wanted both in person and online.
- “Low-threshold” opportunities for initial connection into the life of the congregation, so new people can quickly make their first friends and feel they belong (both in person and online).
- Review of lobby/welcoming spaces on the church campus that guests frequent, for recommendations that will enhance best user-friendliness and potential decluttering and/or a low-cost refresh.

The training and new systems (plus a declutter/potential refresh of welcoming spaces, or a plan for it) will be fully implemented by or before **Lent 2022**, or **fall 2022** at the latest. Once these are in place, the Guest Connections Team will make certain that any time newcomers are on the church property for any event or activity, these new welcome systems are operative.

So that the pastors, staff and church leadership may learn new approaches to creating connective momentum following church activities or events to reach new people, upon this report’s acceptance Pastor Nate will schedule a two-hour all-church **Triad Strategy Training Session** (offered both in person and on Zoom) led by an MCCI prescription coach by or before **March 2022**. Thereafter, every major church event will be planned as part of a Triad, always with the outward focus of creating connectable opportunities to make friends with the neighborhood and community in Christ’s love.

3. We Love Children and Their Families.

In response to concerns the MCCI Team heard about desiring a stronger connection between the Richfield congregation and the CFC, upon this report’s acceptance the clergy team, CFC director Kathy, and church leadership will identify **a month during the first quarter of 2022** that will be designated as **“We Love Our CFC” Month** (or another name). During this four-week time period, the following emphases will be planned (as well as any additional ideas that may be added):

- Each week during the worship service, a parent/set of parents will be invited to **share how the CFC assisted and blessed their family during the pandemic** while they, as essential workers, needed to continue working outside the home (or other stories of the CFC’s value and impact).
- During the month, the CFC children will be invited to **sing or to be present and recognized in worship**, along with their parents, as cherished young world-changers and as part of the overall Richfield church family.



- One Sunday morning will be designated as an occasion for a **"Blessing of the Parents."** All parents with children at home—both CFC parents and church member parents—will be prayed for and given a special gift as a symbol of love and support from the Richfield congregation.
- One Sunday morning will be designated to include a **"Recognition and Blessing of the CFC Teachers/Staff,"** with a special thank you gift.

Going forward, Rev. Hope and CFC director Kathy will partner to ensure the **full integration** of Richfield's children and family ministry and the CFC children and families. An MCCI prescription coach may be provided to give input and guidance if requested.

Additionally, **in order to extend an even more comprehensive, "all means all" welcome** to children and their families from across the surrounding community, upon this report's acceptance the MCCI will invite leaders from MCCI sister church Centennial UMC to offer information and guidance as Richfield considers **initiating a satellite chapter of their "Flames" monthly ministry gathering.**

"Flames" is for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and follows a faith development curriculum that includes songs, videos, Bible verses, discussion, prayer and hands-on activities, including a potential confirmation curriculum. The clergy team will identify a **"Flames" Discernment Team** of at least five members who will investigate this opportunity as another possible way for the church to expand its welcome to more children and their families, and who will bring a feasibility recommendation to the Administrative Board (including a potential launch date if recommended) by or before **June 2022.**

4. Dreaming Forward: New Signature Ministry.

In response to the members and leaders who told the MCCI Team they believe Richfield needs to identify its next signature ministry, upon acceptance of this report Pastor Nate and the Administrative Board will confirm a new **Signature Ministry Exploration Team** (that will include Pastor Nate) by or before **May 2022.**

A prescription coach will be provided to guide the team's process, using a careful plan to research **high-impact opportunities** to connect with and serve the needs or interests of the surrounding mission field, with an emphasis on **building invitational relationships** with those who are without a faith community connection. (Possible ideas that were suggested by members during the MCCI Express Day included a weekday Learning Series for Seniors on current issues of social justice, a Parenting Series, connecting with the arts community, theater/drama/music classes for children, adult community theater, "Story Church" and others.)

The Signature Ministry Research Team's work will include **reviewing detailed relevant demographic data** from "Mission Insight" to help the church better understand who lives in its surrounding mission field and what their needs and interests are; **interviewing** service organizations, schools, government offices, businesses and other entities in the immediate area; **networking** through the Chamber of Commerce and similar venues; and other strategic steps.

The Signature Ministry Research Team's work will conclude by or before **Fall 2022**, and the team will provide a report and proposal to the Administrative Board regarding at least one next signature ministry focus the team has identified.

Upon confirmation by the Administrative Board, the new signature ministry initiative will be launched. The MCCI recommends that **every class, group and ministry** across the congregation identify one or more ways to invest time and energy in the new signature ministry on an ongoing basis, using the congregation's vast amount of talent, experience and expertise as all join together in the new signature ministry effort.



Immediate Governance Decision Steps

The congregation will hold the following **Town Hall Meetings** within the next 30 days to discuss these prescriptions:

1. **Sunday, October 24** after worship service from **10:35-11:15 a.m.** in **Fellowship Hall**
2. **Sunday, November 7** after worship service from **10:35-11:15 a.m.** in the **Sanctuary**
3. **Thursday, November 18** online (**Zoom**) from **7:00-8:00 p.m.**

Facilitators for these Town Hall Meetings will be identified by Pastor Nate in conjunction with the MCCI Team.

The **congregation will vote on this report** to either embrace it or reject it at an official **church conference** led by the district superintendent on **Sunday, November 21 following the worship service (10:30 a.m.)**.

If embraced by a **75% or more vote** of the official membership present, the MCCI Team will designate prescription coaches (who will be compensated by the Minnesota Conference) to partner with Richfield UMC for implementation of these prescriptions.

If the prescriptions are rejected, the MCCI partnership process will cease.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey, Director of the Missional Church Consultation Initiative (MCCI)

Rev. Dan Johnson, Minnesota Conference District Superintendent

Rev. Michelle Hargrave, Centenary United Methodist Church, Mankato, Minnesota

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