

## Leadership Discipline White Paper No. Three: Facilitating Cohesiveness - Designing a Unit That Works Together

*Definition: Facilitating Cohesiveness requires designing a unit that works together. A unit in which every participant owns and shares the church's mission promotes cohesiveness. I believe developing such an environment results in a cohesive unit that has an increased capacity for agility, strength, creativity, and disciple making.*

I look forward to our weekly staff\* meetings at St. Luke UMC. Not because of the 8-10 am weekly time slot. (That's early for a meeting!) Nor because of the excellent fellowship. (We enjoy each other, but can think of other ways to spend time together!) I treasure St. Luke UMC staff meetings because those two hours a week are a key component in our steady progress toward our church's vision.

It has only been in the last 9 months that I have felt this way about staff meetings. Previously I appreciated the support, creativity, communication and interaction that our staff unit experienced in weekly meetings. But often we left the meetings knowing that we had not spent our time as productively as we could have.

We took action two years ago that dramatically raised the bar in what happened during our staff meetings. It also facilitated cohesiveness in our staff unit. We invited church leadership coach, Craig Robertson\*\*, to lead us in an intense 12 month process that radically transformed us as a team. The catalyst for this decision was the realization that with the completion and opening of our expanded facilities we had many new discipleship and outreach opportunities which would only be realized if **we changed how we were functioning as a staff team.**

Here is why. What our members perceived as one of our church's greatest assets was also a liability. St Luke UMC was (and still is) blessed with competent, highly-trained, hard-working, over-achieving and personable staff. However there was a hurdle. Though staff morale and relationships were excellent . . . though a strong work ethic in staff was evident . . . though quality work was being accomplished . . . staff members often worked in silos.

The process introduced to us by Craig Robertson does not tolerate silos. Rather it emphasizes working together as a unit. It took hard work and the restructuring of our team, but the silos have come down. The result is an increased cohesiveness, a greater capacity for ministry, growing momentum and movement toward our vision and mission.

The 12 month process involved us meeting offsite as a ministry staff once a month for 8 hours. Together we studied Scripture, held each other accountable for spiritual formation, read and discussed leadership resources and wrestled with the vision, mission, values, goals and structure that had been previously discerned by our church's Servant Leadership Team (church council). Yes, we spent an entire year on this agenda. Sometimes it felt like we were standing still . . . often we could not see the tangible results of our work . . . and occasionally we would grow frustrated with each other. But by the end we felt increased ownership in the mission of our church. In addition, we were functioning as a cohesive unit instead of as a group of effective leaders working independently. It was an amazing transition that set the stage for a new day at St. Luke UMC.

Near the end of this 12 month process, we totally renovated our weekly staff meeting structure. The full staff moved from a weekly to a twice a month meeting. The primary purpose of this team is communications and networking.

We also formed a Program Ministry staff team (Directors) who meet for 2 hours weekly. This is the staff group that meets from 8-10 am on Tuesday mornings. We quickly have become a cohesive unit that focuses on our vision, mission, values, goals and metrics. We also hold each other accountable for spiritual formation and work plan development.

The result of the cohesion of the Directors is an increased capacity for agility, strength, creativity and disciple making. An example is the recent decision to launch a 6<sup>th</sup> worship service that especially reaches young adults. The team discerned the need to do this over a few short weeks (agility). A sub team of well-respected and influential leaders from the Directors group was immediately formed to begin developing plans for this new service under the guidance of our Build and Introduce Director (strength). This team is systematically leading us through appropriate steps for launching a new service and looking at creative ways to address various obstacles that we are encountering (creativity). The primary purpose of this service is to reach unreached persons for Christ (disciple-making).

The increased cohesion in the staff unit has changed the practice of ministry at St. Luke UMC. Note that these outcomes were present to a degree with the past staff team. But they have increased exponentially with the new cohesive unit.

- Momentum is building;
- Large ministry issues are being addressed in strategic and wholistic ways;
- Effectiveness is being measured with greater intentionality;
- Decisions are being made more strategically;
- Support for each other has increased;
- Communication among staff is improving.

Cohesiveness is essential to a team unit operating at their maximum capacity. Facilitating cohesiveness is an often overlooked, but always important function of effective leadership.

\*Our Directors meetings have replaced weekly meetings with all of the ministry staff. The Directors team at St. Luke UMC consists of the leaders of children, youth, build and introduce (evangelism), grow and equip (adult discipleship), going forth (service and outreach), communications and the lead pastor.

\*\* Craig Robertson is the founder and leader of Spiritual Leadership Inc. and also a member of the Lexington St. Luke United Methodist Church.