

2009 ■ Vine Street ■ Future Story ■ 2019

VINE STREET IS A CHURCH WITH A GLOBAL VISION, YET FIRMLY ROOTED IN THIS LOCAL COMMUNITY.

We realized in 2008 that we want to do ministry not just “in and for the city” but very specifically *in* and *with* and *for* this part of the city. Vine Street had always taken very seriously the promise that we would be Christ’s witnesses from our doorsteps to the end of the earth (see Acts 1:8), but we noticed that we hadn’t looked very attentively at what’s just outside our doorstep; and so we began to meet our neighbors in Sylvan Park and Woodlawn – individuals, families, businesses, schools, everybody... We started paying attention to what God was doing in the neighborhood, and aligning our own ministry projects accordingly.

Now we don’t just “do our thing” but work very closely with churches, neighborhood associations, and other

groups in our area. We Disciples see ourselves as a movement for wholeness in the world - and a big part of that world longing for wholeness is right outside our doors.

We Disciples see ourselves as a movement for wholeness in the world - and a big part of that world longing for wholeness is right outside our doors.

Starting in 2010, our Wednesday night dinners and programs were no longer just church family

gatherings. They started becoming true neighborhood events: we invited our neighbors over for dinner, we ate together, we got to know each other, and we talked about the issues people who live and work here deal with. You wouldn’t believe how many people continue to come in after work just for the meal – there’s such a hunger for community!

Now we look at our building and grounds as a place where community is built and strengthened: our playground is a favorite



gathering place for children and families; a good number of condo residents in the area enjoy the park and gardens around the church. You know, budgeting funds just to add a coat of paint to the building used to trigger a big debate about spending money “for ourselves”. Now you’d have to look long and hard to find anybody around here who’d say that keeping our building and grounds well-maintained is taking away resources from ministry. **This building, this green space is community ministry!**

In addition to the Pastoral Counseling Center, our Ministry CoOp now has offices and meeting rooms for three other non-profit organizations – the rooms are used practically 24/7, and we work closely not only with the agencies that are part of the Ministry CoOp, but also with other congregations, neighborhood associations and schools in the area. We make plans together, work together, and evaluate any new ministry initiatives together.

Our Ministry CoOp now has offices and meeting rooms for three other non-profit organizations.

The part of the building that used to be the Youth Wing, now houses a Mission Center with bunks for about thirty people, showers, kitchen, and a living area – we use it for Room in the Inn, and we regularly host volunteer groups who participate in our Mission Trip to Nashville program (just last week we had a group of Disciples from Honduras who worked with a different agency every day).

Our worship services each have a clear profile. Each has its own unique format, but all of them are also clearly “us.” Most of us were surprised when we started listening to each other as well as our neighbors, and discovered how much our personalities, tastes, spiritual needs and learning styles shape what we perceive to be good worship. When we hired Jamie as our



Associate Minister, we knew exactly what kind of person we needed to facilitate our Sunday night service.

We've also had for years now an extended gathering time in the welcome area before each of our services. You can have a cup of coffee, chat with friends and guests, and occasionally you get to hear a three minute pep-talk about a new ministry. **Many of us watch and comment on ministry updates that we run on tv's in the welcome area.** We have clips about our small groups, short videos from mission trips, new-member profiles with interviews - the quality of those visuals is amazing, and the gathering time has done more to improve internal communication than any other initiative!

When people in Nashville see the Vine Street chalice or even just hear somebody say, "Vine Street!" they can immediately quote our tagline and name one of our community ministry projects – at least one! **People just know who we are and what we are about.** We don't wait for them to walk in, we get the word out (and not just the word!). It took us a while to figure out where to spend our communications dollars most effectively, but we finally realized that good communication is an essential part of good outreach. We now have a communications audit every other year where we assess the needs and determine how best to respond. Having two websites – one for external, and one for internal communication – was just the beginning. Having more face-to-face time through our annual planning retreats, the monthly joint sessions, and our house groups also had a huge impact on our internal communication. And people pick up a lot of information when they enter or pass through the welcome area:

Having more face-to-face time through our annual planning retreats, the monthly joint sessions, and our house groups had a huge impact on our internal communication.



they just love watching the short reports about everything that's going on.

One of the things I like best about my church is that our people really own its mission and every aspect of its ministry. I can't think of a single member who doesn't participate in at least one small group. Some of the groups last only a few weeks or even a few days, others have been meeting for years. But all of them do so much to build relationships across the congregation, and strengthen the ties of mutual care. I don't know exactly what Jamie's job description is, but in addition to her worship leadership and communication responsibilities, she spends a lot of time coordinating all those groups and helping them get started.

Our leadership training program has been in place for several years now, and we get calls from other churches all the time who want to know how we did it. How did we do it? We didn't leave it to chance. We have training retreats, and every meeting – whether it's the elders, the deacons, the board or who knows what committee – has a fifteen-minute segment where we work on building knowledge and improving skills. When we ask you to lead, we give you the tools you need to succeed.

We are very good at setting goals together and holding each other accountable as fellow leaders. Every time we meet, at any level of leadership, we monitor our progress and celebrate what we have accomplished together. The second item on any agenda around here is Celebration! We don't take anyone's work for granted – we set our goals together, we work together, we support each other, and we turn on the spotlight as much as we can.

The second item on any agenda around here is Celebration!

You're asking me to name one program area where we have created the most significant change in the last ten years? Just one? Well, I'd love to talk about all the new programs we started, but when it



comes to significant change, it's got to be **FACE – the forum for adult christian education, a. k. a. the liberation of Christian education from the grip of Sunday school.** We now have approximately forty courses, ranging in length from three weeks to eighteen months, that cover the entire curriculum for adult learning and spiritual formation. Some of the shorter courses are offered three times a year, but the majority only once or twice. In addition, we have ad-hoc classes where we discuss current issues in light of the gospel. Last week, for example, we started a four-week forum on Wednesday nights, where we look at the need for additional light rail lines in West Nashville. It's a fascinating conversation around creation stewardship and equal access to the city for non-drivers.

The real revolution, however, was the recognition that Christian education isn't a program, but a dimension of everything we do. Once we realized that, we simply became intentional about it. We have courses on Sunday mornings, house groups, Wednesday night events, and short-term Bible study groups during the week, but we also spend significant time reflecting on our work together. In February, for example, when we hosted Room in the Inn, the group preparing dinner in the kitchen one night talked about food and Christ – it was amazing to hear the connections they drew between the communion table and the tables in the kitchen and the fellowship hall. In worship, we become the people of the Table, and we live as people of the Table in every dimension of our daily lives – I tell you, that kitchen conversation was one of the most profound Christian education events I've witnessed in a while.

Christian education isn't a program, but a dimension of everything we do.

THE FUTURE IS NOW. 

