

The Road Less Traveled – September 9, 2016

One week from tomorrow we enter into an important and exciting period in the life of our church. On Saturday, Sept. 17, we officially launch *As For Me & My House*, a visioning process that will help us look to the future and discern where and who God is calling us to be as a congregation. On that day, the 10-member Core Leadership Team that will guide us through this process will spend the day with Dr. Eric McKinney from the Texas Methodist Foundation to begin this process of discernment and holy conversation. I pray it is a process that, over the next few months, will involve every member of the Aledo UMC family.

Several people have asked me why we are doing this and why now? The answer is simple. We find ourselves at a critical time in the life of our congregation and our community. We've all read the stories about the wave of growth that is coming to East Parker County. We know that over the next 10-15 years thousands of new people will call this area home. And common sense suggests that if the area grows, our church will grow as well. And to believe that is a mistake.

Church growth studies are littered with examples of churches that have failed to grow – and even shrunk – as the community around them explodes. No longer can we simply apply a multiplier to the population and assume that percentage will end up in our worship services. That model no longer works. People will come to our church because they are drawn to the mission and ministry that happens here. They will come to our church because here they will find an environment that encourages and equips them to live beyond themselves, to interpret and answer the call of discipleship that God places on their lives. Not just a place to make friends and enjoy fellowship, not just a place that offers enticing programming to them and their kids, but a family that embraces them and helps them onto a path that is literally life-changing.

In other words, they will come if they perceive that something holy is happening here. That God is at work here. And we as a community of faith are part of that holy work.

For that to happen, though, we have to have a clear sense of who we are as a community of faith. It isn't enough to simply say we want to grow. We must first know why we are here, what God is calling us to do, who God is calling us to be.

The temptation, of course, is to simply come up with a list of strategic plans designed to increase our numbers. But to succumb to that temptation is to sound the death knell for our church. Because I am convinced that people seek out a church because they are looking for something they can't find anywhere else. They want to be part of something bigger. They want to be part of something that makes a difference. They want to be part of something that is of God.

And to be that, then we have to first seek out what God wants from us. That's what this process is all about.

But let me warn you, it will not be an easy process. The temptation will be to quickly develop a series of action plans and put them into action. That's not what this is about. It is not about deciding what we think we should do and then asking God to bless it. This process is about discerning where God is already at work and then coming along side God, joining with God, in the Kingdom-building work that is unfolding. So be patient. Make sure you are a part of the

congregational conversations that will happen over the next few months. Be in prayer for the future of our church, because I am convinced that the possibilities are limitless.

Some of you have asked me what my vision for our church is. And this is it. My vision isn't that we get big. Of course I want our church to grow, but that's not a vision. My vision is that we become a family of faith that is relentlessly focused on drawing closer to Christ and offering ourselves to God as partners in the Kingdom-building work that is happening all around us. And, friends, I am convinced that if we are faithful to that vision, our church will grow. We won't need any gimmicks. Those seeking deeper meaning in their lives will be drawn to us like a moth to flame.

In the meantime, be faithful. Be faithful in your attendance and full participation in the life and ministries of our faith family. Be faithful in your giving so that we can continue the good work that is ongoing in our community and around the world. And be faithful to our shared commitment to discern and respond to God's call on our lives. Because in the end, *that's* why we are here.

See you Sunday.