

FUMC-OR Church Council Retreat at Camp Wesley Woods

The Church Council held a retreat at Camp Wesley Woods on August 22-23, 2025. The retreat, which was intended to provide an intentional introspection of our church's mission and ministry activities, consisted of several informational and group discussion sessions. By all measures, the retreat was a resounding success. Key points from the retreat are highlighted below. The summary notes, which are intended to be representative rather than exhaustive, are followed by a few recommended actions for the Church Council.

Church Council Business

- Minutes from the May 27 Church Council meeting were approved.
- It was acknowledged that this is the last council meeting for Daniel Ambercrombie (moving), Shelby Fowler (new job), and Jenny Caughman (retiring).
- The next (and last) council meeting for 2025 will be October 28 at 6:30 pm.
- A FUMCOR charge conference will be held on November 16 at 4:00 pm.

FUMCOR Mission Statement

- A 1-year strategic planning project is proposed for 2026 to develop a mission statement for our church. A deliberate and thorough process should be developed that includes all church stakeholders, similar to the development of our welcoming statement a few years ago.

Nurturing Ministries (children, youth, adult, family, worship)

- There is a concern for the “freshness” of activities for the children and youth programs. An effort is underway to hire a strong, full-time children/youth director.
- Volunteerism is a challenge for several of the programs (e.g., the children's program needs 15-15 volunteers but have only 5).
- The current budget for supplies is also a challenge (e.g., Sunday School, children's church, VBS).
- Recommend identifying more community-sponsored events where we can involve our children and youth to give them more diversity of engagement.
- Recommend evaluating space utilization, especially regarding “safe space” requirements.
- Recommend coordinating education across age groups to encourage intra-family discussions (spiritual education, not indoctrination).
- Consider how different age groups can inter-connect (e.g., young adults work with youth and youth work with children).

Community Ministries (Meals, shoppes, recovery, trips)

- Volunteerism is a challenge for several of the programs (e.g. community meals and food for kids [Tuesday loading/unloading]).
- Need to identify more ways to engage First Recovery participants. Transportation is often the limiting factor.
- Opportunity for First Recovery and Social Concerns to collaborate on permanent housing needs in Oak Ridge.
- Opportunity for First Recovery and Shoppes to collaborate on clothing needs.

- Consider coordinating and sharing volunteers with St. Stephen's.
- Recommend that we expand our involvement in local community activities as a means of being more visible to the community.

Collective Brainstorming

- Participation in mission trips is dwindling and aging. Perhaps conducting weekend trips and/or scheduling trips during 2-week breaks of the Oak Ridge school system will entice more and younger participation.
- We should keep the congregation better apprised of what Church Council is doing.
- There is room to improve coordination of Sunday morning greeters and ushers.
- Starting/restarting church-based athletic teams (softball, pickleball, etc.) might be useful to engage younger families.
- We should evaluate our current committee structure, especially regarding its possible impact on volunteerism concerns.

Follow-up Actions

Many suggestions and recommendations were voiced during the retreat. Several of those are expected to be addressed by the responsible leader and committee. A few significant cross-cutting needs emerged that will require follow-up by the Church Council. These follow-ups include:

1. *Strategic Planning.* Building on our broadly accepted welcoming statement, we should conduct a strategic-planning-like process that results in a newly formulated mission statement. The mission statement will help to guide future development and growth of our people and programs.
2. *Space Utilization.* The growth of our children and youth programs has created a need for additional space that meets "safe space" requirements. Also, the growth of community outreach programs has created a need for more storage space. An *ad hoc* team should be created to evaluate our building-wide space utilization and to make recommendations for improved space utilization.
3. *Volunteerism.* Several of our missions and ministries suffer from insufficient participation of volunteers. A new Stewardship Committee was formed in 2025 but dwindling participation has hampered its effectiveness. Deliberate attention should be given to rebuild/strengthen this committee with a special focus on increasing volunteerism. Also, an *ad hoc* team should be created to evaluate our current committee structure to assess the cost/benefit of each committee in terms of time commitments.