

Grace and peace be with you! May God's hand guide me in my message and may the Holy Spirit guide each of us today and every day. Amen.

Good morning! I'm Tim Brady. I am honored to be the Chair of the Church Leadership Council. Today I would like to share highlights of our visioning efforts at Kona UMC.

To begin, first, let me cite John Wesley saying that he looks upon the whole world as his parish. Second, Scripture from the Book of Acts, Chapter 2 verse 4, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability."

Five years ago, our English, Samoan, and Tongan ministries came together to create a new vision and guide us to achieve our mission, "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

The vision process involves an annual survey conducted during the month of August. We follow the survey with an annual retreat, open to congregants and visitors, to discuss survey results and make recommendations to the Leadership Council. The Council addresses the recommendations and sets goals for the next year. Typically, we have 50 percent of our yearly average attendance respond to the surveys. This year, the attendance at the visioning retreat, half of which included ZOOM attendees, was similar to the attendance of each of the past retreats.

Thinking of the visioning efforts, I am reminded of John Wesley's comments regarding stewardship. "Stewardship emerged out of indebtedness to God. Faithful stewardship extends beyond money- it is the totality of Christian life in speech, conduct, and influence over others to reflect the same careful consideration of the gifts God gives each person."

Our visioning is guided by three simple questions. First, is this what God our Father expects of us? Second, what would Jesus do? And third, how does this reflect the Holy Spirit within us? What an incredibly challenging charge for us all! Our hallmark standard from well over 90 percent of all surveys when asked, what motivates you to attend Kona UMC, is that we are an open and friendly Church,

our Church personality reflects a welcoming and caring people, and our strength is in our cultural diversity. Isn't this what God would expect from His people? I mention, parenthetically, that a few respondents this year said they miss the coffee and donuts after the service.

The question- "What activities are most important to you?"-identified three areas. The first is Sunday worship, second is outreach and community service, and third, growing our youth programs. At the risk of missing many cited outreach activities, let me just mention a few. Feeding the poor and homeless, responding to the needs of individuals who are in crisis, ill, or homebound, and our youth scholarships, and backpacks. But, of course, isn't this what Jesus would do? Remember he did not just heal the sick and feed the masses, he coached his disciples, he taught, and he turned water into wine for celebration.

The surveys and retreats have also helped us identify challenges for our congregation. Respondents voiced concerns about the lack of young people in the Church, the need for greater Tongan and Samoan visible participation in leadership roles, and the overall need for more congregants to be involved in Church activities. These concerns are a function of the Holy Spirit, reflected in us, moving us to action. As a point of grace, let me say that there is no lack of response from any of our congregation when we are called upon to use our gifts from God to help those in need.

Now, let me share the direction for 2022. We, like many churches, faced the daunting challenge of Covid, not knowing for sure what to do. When the pandemic lock down occurred, we did not waiver in our faith or our need to provide worship opportunities to our congregation. We never missed a Sunday worship service. We adapted, we created a safe option for in-person and remote worship, albeit technologically and logistically challenging at times, but we survived and grew. We continued to offer Bible study, prayer meetings, and youth programs through ZOOM and Facebook. Can you imagine if Jesus had Facebook how much more He could have done? During the Covid crisis, our website and Facebook worship service attendance has grown to well over one thousand hits per week. These "hits" are worldwide. This is an accomplishment for which we should be joyful because it is through our stewardship that we are able to provide this technology alternative. The whole world is indeed our parish.

Remember the adage, God moves in mysterious ways? As a result of our technology alternatives, we provide on-line access to worship services to the deaf and hard of hearing community resulting in a new ministry. Our pre-recorded deaf-friendly worship service includes signing and captioning.

Our vision 2022 theme is restructuring, recommitment, and responding. Action recommendations include a plan to open Sunday School space, recognizing the requirement to comply with safe distancing guidance. We will continue to improve our technology and our ability to deliver quality worship services online to the deaf and hard of hearing community and those who choose to worship remotely during and after the Covid crisis.

Having lost more than a full year of working together face to face created a need to assess how we collaborate and participate in fulfilling our mission. The visioning process recommendation is to restructure our working committees. We also recognized the fact that much of our outreach, community service, and responding to those in need is based on a one-to-one relationship, that it is not necessary to have face to face meetings to provide help, but that a personal individual contact usually triggers a response to provide needed assistance.

Our congregation can be proud of our successes and our response to the needs of our community. The Holy Spirit is truly working among us. We still need to nurture and involve our youth for our future. The Covid crisis has opened a window of opportunity. Capitalizing on the use of technology we may be able to communicate with, involve, and get action from our youth through venues in which they are comfortable and accomplished.

There are challenges and opportunities that we face in 2022 and beyond. Together we can grow disciples through worship, outreach, and living the gospel in fellowship with our Church and our community.

Paraphrasing Acts, Chapter 2 verse 4, "All of us are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in other languages as the Spirit gave us ability." Each one of us speaks a special language given to us through our faith in God and we are able to use that language to share a bond empowering us to fulfill our mission.

Thank you and may the Holy Spirit be with each of us as we go forward with open hearts, open minds, and open doors. Amen.