



SOUTHVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH

Aha Moment, “Gut Check,” and Plan to Keep Learning

A Sunday night children’s program and a living nativity scene seemed like really good ways for Southview Community Church (SCC) to meet its primary mission of reaching people who don’t attend church. “People loved the children’s program and we ran it successfully for two years. But when we looked at who came, not a single one of the 50 children weren’t already going to church somewhere,” said Lead Pastor William Attaway. Similarly, the annual two-night living nativity scene in December was very popular—among congregation members and their friends from other churches.

Rational Decision, Surprise Reaction

SCC had other programs to nurture its own congregation and wanted to keep finding ways to reach the 142,000 people within a five-mile radius of the SCC campus who didn’t attend any church. “We simply couldn’t keep investing in programs that didn’t help us meet our mission,” William said. After much discussion among the elder team (SCC’s governing body), both programs were eliminated, one in 2012 and one in 2014.

William vividly remembers how surprised he and the elders were by the congregation’s reactions to decisions they saw as rational and mission-driven. “We didn’t consider the range of emotions tied to

the programs. Individuals who had been deeply involved in these programs over the years didn’t have the context of the hours of meetings that led to the changes. And, we didn’t do a very good job of bringing them along in our decision-making process. We ended up spending a lot of time after the announcements in one-on-one conversations listening to concerns. But I’m not sure we completely understood what we should have done better.”

Fast forward to 2016, when William and the elder team decided to take on the Performance Imperative Organizational Self-Assessment (PIOSA). They



Southview Community Church

Location: Herndon, VA

Field: Religion

Budget: <\$1 million

“ The PIOSA gave us a picture of where we are now and sparked ideas for practices we can put in place immediately. ”

William Attaway,
Lead Pastor,
Southview Community Church

completed Pillars 1 (leadership) and 5 (culture of learning) individually and then came together to discuss their ratings and rationale for each of the practices. The conversation helped the elder team see where they were in alignment, tag some areas for further consideration, and reflect on next steps for getting better in their efforts.

The exercise put the congregation’s reactions to the program eliminations in a whole new light. “I realized that—although we had explained why we eliminated the programs—we hadn’t modeled the kind of thoughtful, clear, informative, and timely communications people need.” Now with a more detailed communication plan in place, William and the elder team are committed to provide greater transparency about program decisions and engage the congregation more effectively around how to meet SCC’s mission.

The “Gut Check”

The PIOSA also gave William the idea to do an annual “gut check” with the members of his elder team. If they took the opportunity to reflect, did they want to spend another year on the board? William knew he wanted people to continue for the right reasons, not because they would feel



guilty about saying no. Guilt and need are short term and ineffective motivators. Yet this was the first time he had one-on-one conversations with the express

purpose of discussing whether it made sense for each individual to continue.

Some of those conversations opened his eyes to issues he hadn’t seen before and could now address. In one case, an elder stepped down shortly afterward. “It was the right thing for him, but I don’t think he would have stepped down if we had continued to assume and not opened up a space for this conversation,” William said.

Setting the Agenda

Moving forward, the elder team plans to review one pillar of the PIOSA every six months. The first time, they set seven improvement goals and reviewed progress in each monthly meeting. Twice a year, they will pause, reflect, and set the agenda for the next six months. This plan for making incremental progress is the key to success for a small church with limited resources but plenty of will.

Performance in Practice

This story is part of the Leap Ambassadors Community Performance in Practice series, which features stories about organizations on the path to high performance—different in size, location, mission, and maturity, but with a shared commitment to getting better at getting better. Find additional stories at leapambassadors.org/performance-in-practice/

The Leap Ambassadors Community

The Leap Ambassadors Community is a community of nonprofit thought leaders, leader practitioners, progressive funders, policy makers, and instigators who share the focus and purpose to inspire, motivate, and support nonprofit and public sector leaders (and their stakeholders) to build great organizations for greater societal impact and to increase the expectation and adoption of high performance as the path to this end. Learn more at leapambassadors.org



This document, developed collaboratively by the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community (LAC), is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). We encourage and grant permission for the distribution and reproduction of copies of this material in its entirety (with original attribution). Please refer to the Creative Commons link for license terms for unmodified use of LAC documents.