

THE ASBURY FIRST
DREAMSCAPE
Laying the foundation for the next 200 years

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Dreamscape [dreem-skeyp] (n.) – A vision for who God is calling us to be.

A Time to Dream

In 2020, Asbury First United Methodist Church will celebrate its bicentennial, marking two hundred years of faithful service to God and neighbor. None of us were here for the beginning and, by God’s grace, none of us will be here for the end. We are so grateful for the legacy of those who have gone before, and we choose today to accept our part in the story, making a way for those who come after. Our prayer is that our decisions will ensure a solid foundation for Asbury First as we embark on the next two hundred years and beyond. We walk humbly and tread lightly, but recognize the gift of this moment—to celebrate our past, assess our present, and plan for our future. In short, this is a moment to dream about who we are and who God is calling us to be. This Dreamscape—formed through the dreams of this community—is an attempt to do just that.

“Keep alive the dream, for as long as we have a dream in our hearts, we cannot lose the significance of living.” – Howard Thurman

I. PRELUDE TO A DREAMSCAPE

A. The Beginning of a Dream

The planning process for Asbury First's Dreamscape began in the fall of 2015, shortly into the tenure of our new Senior Minister, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Cady. In a series of sermons on dreaming, he reminded us that we dream *in community, with humility, and for a specific time and place*. It is this concept that formed the basis for this Dreamscape.

That same fall, we placed a "dream board" in the Gathering Center and invited the entire community to share its dreams for Asbury First by writing them on the board. Children and adults alike contributed hundreds of dreams for the future of Asbury First—no dream was too silly or too big. It was a concept we had used that summer at the Park Avenue Festival and at the 2015 Tent Week to solicit dreams from our Greater Rochester community.

While the "dream board" was up that fall, we hosted a series of town hall meetings and conversations with various leadership groups throughout the church asking the same five questions:

1. What is Asbury First known for?
2. What does Asbury First do better than most?
3. What are our growing edges?
4. What are the most important things we do?
5. If we picked up a newspaper in ten years (assuming there are still newspapers in ten years) and read a headline about Asbury First, what would we hope it said?

As we read the over 400 dreams from the board and heard the responses of various groups throughout the church, a dreamscape—a picture of both who we are and who we long to be as a people of faith—started to emerge.

During the season of Lent in the winter of 2016, while the congregation prayed about who God is calling us to be, we took down the dream board and transferred every dream (the silly and the serious) to notecards. During the season of Easter, a season ripe with the promise of new life, we placed all notecards onto an "affinity board" with the goal of finding common themes among the dreams. Our community was asked to find dreams that belonged together and move them near one another, as well as to put stars on the dreams believed to be most important. Over the next few weeks, we estimate there were over 10,000 moves. As the affinity groups emerged and were labeled by the community—with themes like outreach, diversity, inclusivity, and small groups—the emerging Dreamscape became even clearer. Then—as Joseph did for the Pharaoh—we needed people to prayerfully interpret our dreams. Enter the "Dream Team."

B. Saddling our Dreams – the Work of the Dream Team

“Saddle your dreams before you ride them.” -Mary Webb

ASBURY FIRST AT-A-GLANCE:

Location: Rochester, NY

Footprint: Our campus includes three buildings, one of which (1040) is fully accessible and two of which are not (1010 and 1050)

Membership: 2,326 (1,290 Family units)

Worship Services: Three traditional services (8:30, 10:00, and 11:00)
8:30 and 11:00 take place in the sanctuary, and 10:00 takes place in the chancel and includes weekly communion

Average Weekly Worship Attendance: 702

Annual Operating Plan: ~\$2 Million

Annual Giving: 487 family units pledge just over \$1M

Endowment: ~\$8m

Total Staff: 38 staff (*3 appointed clergy, 13 full time, 25 part time/contract*)

Weekly Volunteers: 233

Weekly Children Engagement: 115

Weekly Youth Engagement: 45

In June of 2016, with the blessing of the Church Council, a strategic planning team, appropriately dubbed the “Dream Team” began work on the Asbury First Dreamscape. Stephen called together a group of twelve individuals of differing opinions, backgrounds, and tenures at Asbury First in order to make sense of our dreams.

As the Dream Team culled through the hundreds of dreams, the thousands of moves from the affinity board, and pages of notes from community conversations, they were pleased to discover Asbury First is in a healthy place as a congregation. People are generally happy, the church is growing in attendance year to year (albeit slowly), and there is a great deal of optimism as we look forward. For as much enthusiasm as there is about our congregation, however, there are clear areas—outreach, connection, inclusion, and growth—where we can do more to reach people inside and outside our congregation.

1. Outreach

No one reading the dreams of our community or hearing the conversations of our members could doubt that outreach is a cornerstone of Asbury First’s identity. For at least fifty years (starting with the establishment of the Storehouse), Asbury First has demonstrated a lasting commitment to outreach both on and off our campus. It has accomplished this through congregation-led and -developed ministries, as well as through strategic partnerships. The dreams of our community affirm the hard work that has

gone into outreach, but challenge us to go deeper—not just to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick, but to figure out why people are hungry, naked, and ill. In other words, we clearly want to extend beyond mercy and compassion to justice. Fortunately for the Dream Team, a separate Outreach Task Force worked for over a year to detail a plan called, “A Way Forward,” which was approved by Church Council in December of 2016. This plan translated the dreams of Asbury First for outreach into a strategy for change. The Dreamscape acknowledges and affirms that work by recommending the full implementation of “A Way Forward” as the goal for outreach.

OUTREACH SNAPSHOT:
<u>On-campus:</u> Dining and Caring Center (<i>~35k meals annually</i>) The Storehouse (<i>~6000 families served annually</i>) Rochester Area Interfaith Hospitality Network (RAIHN) UR Well clinic Grocery Bag Ministry
<u>Off-campus:</u> School 41 West Ave Youth Café Habitat for Humanity
<u>Beyond our borders:</u> Project Chacocente Miracle Garden

2. **Connection**

Many feel very connected to Asbury First, in particular through our worship services. People expressed a connection to the music, the preaching, and the tradition of the service. Similarly, there are many examples of deep connection outside of the worship experience. Perhaps the greatest of these connections are our long-term adult Sunday school classes (the Doublers, Fifty-Plus Fellowship, Growing Spirits/Living Edge, and the Partnership classes), some of who have been meeting together and supporting one another for over sixty years. They stand as tangible reminders of what Christian life together can and should be. Similarly, our children and youth ministries have long-established and well-respected legacies of faithful engagement in Christian community.

While we offer several ongoing and short-term small group opportunities (some educational and some support- or fellowship-oriented), many dream of a community where there is a place for all who want one outside of worship, regardless of age or circumstance.

3. *Inclusion*

Our community of dreamers believed inclusion should be celebrated and we should continue to emphasize that all are welcome at Asbury First. Several dreamers lauded and expressed a desire to maintain our inclusive stance toward the LGBTQ+ community (Asbury First voted to adopt “Reconciling Statement” in 2015) and to push for change within the United Methodist denomination towards greater inclusion. On a similar note, while we have great diversity of thought, ideology, and age, we lack in racial and ethnic diversity, being a predominantly white congregation. Many dreamers advocate for our Asbury First community and staff to reflect better the rich diversity of the Greater Rochester community. Finally, several dreamers mourn the inaccessibility of two of our buildings to those with handicapping conditions.

4. *Growth*

Good things are meant to be shared, and we want to share the life we have found at Asbury First. Growth is a common theme in almost every area of our life together. We want to grow in our faith, grow in our relationships with one another, grow in our outreach to the community, grow in our financial stability and resources as a congregation, and grow in our attendance. We believe that growing in these areas will help us grow in our love of God and neighbor.

C. Conclusion

Having reviewed the dream data and identified the central themes, the Dream Team—in conversation with church leadership—has attempted to clarify Asbury First’s mission, describe our core values, and articulate a vision for our future with strategic goals to help bring our dreams to life. The dreams are not just those of the team, but those of all of us—the entire Asbury First community.

Over the winter and spring of 2017, the Dream Team presented an initial draft of this Dreamscape with the following:

- Church Council
- Trustees
- SPRC (*Staff Parish Relations Committee*)
- Worship & the Arts Committee
- Asbury First Ministers & Staff
- Technology Committee
- Stewardship Committee
- Communications Committee
- Doublers Sunday School Class
- Parables of Parenting Sunday School Class
- 50+ Fellowship Sunday School Class
- Growing Spirits/Living Edge Sunday School Class
- Sunday Morning Bible Study
- Children & Youth programming areas
- Planned Giving Committee
- Outreach Committee
- Investment Committee

Each group was asked to provide feedback, as well as to commit to developing action plans for the goals relating to their area. These groups offered helpful insight, which both affirmed the direction of the team and clarified this final report.

The Dreamscape that follows is offered to the community of Asbury First by the community of Asbury First. It was assembled by the Dream Team but came from all of us. It represents two years of listening, praying, and dreaming together about who we are and who God is calling us to be. Thank you for taking this journey with us.

II. DREAMSCAPE

A. Mission

(i.e. "What are we trying to accomplish?")

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

Just as the Christian faith is about bringing life to the world, Asbury First is about bringing life to this community. We believe the only way to the fullness of life promised by Jesus Christ is through love—love of God and love of neighbor. Through love we find life. In a love-filled life, we are led to serve others. Through service to others, we find love fully expressed. This cycle is the heart of discipleship and as such, we believe it is the key to living into God's dream for this community. Thus, our mission at Asbury First is to **love God and neighbor**, to **live fully**, to **serve all**, and then to do it all again. Or said simply—**love. live. serve. repeat.**

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

Love God and neighbor.

Live fully.

Serve all.

Repeat.

SOUND BITE:

Love. Live. Serve. Repeat.

B. Values

(i.e. "What is important to us?")

Asbury First's values represent a description of our guiding principles. These statements are standards of behavior, which are inherent in all we do. We value:

Being Open to All— We believe we are all equal in God's eyes and all are one in Christ. We extend hospitality and encourage full participation for all regardless of any perceived defining characteristic.

Worship— We believe we are at our best when we connect to God together through preaching, prayer, and song. We strive for excellence in all we do, especially in our worship experience.

Community— We believe we are better together; fellowship and care are keys to love and life.

Outreach— We believe everyone deserves hope and fullness of life. We endeavor to practice mercy and work for justice in our local and extended community.

Discipleship— We believe we—adults, youth, and children alike—are called to grow in our faith both as a community and individuals through education, regular worship, meaningful fellowship, a commitment to service, and celebrating rites of passage together.

Generosity— We believe what we have is a gift from God. We share our gifts with an open heart to help meet needs at Asbury First, the Rochester community, and throughout the world.

Stewardship— We believe we must care for the human, physical, and financial resources with which we have been entrusted.

C. Vision

(i.e. "Where do we go from here?")

*Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you ever can.
~A Wesleyan Rule for Life*

The calling of the Christian faith—a calling to the fullness of life expressed in Jesus Christ—has never changed. For twenty centuries, Christians have attempted to live into that calling of love with varying degrees of success. For nearly two centuries, the people of Asbury First have endeavored to do the same, making it our perennial mission to *love God and neighbor, to live fully, and to serve all*. While we have never been perfect, with God's grace we have experienced great successes along the way. More than anything else, our dreams reveal the heart of this community—a heart that breaks for the least, the last, and the lost of this world and longs to make a greater difference. We have always cared for each other and the community around us, but we long to do more. As we look toward the next two centuries, our hope is to ***build upon the good work*** already being done, to ***deepen our life together***, and to ***have a greater impact*** on this community and beyond. Our vision for the future, therefore, does not take us in a radically new direction, but rather asks us to **do more good**.

OUR VISION STATEMENT:

Do More Good.

D. Goals

(i.e. "How will we know when we're there?")

Our mission, values, and vision were identified from our shared dreams but also provided the platform upon which our dreams were clarified. Once the framework was set through the hard work done on the mission, values, and vision, the Dream Team re-examined the dream data to suggest our missional goals for the years ahead. We articulate these goals under the banner of our core values and express them below as future states—as if we have already ***done more good*** in each of these areas.

Each goal has a number, a title, a concise description of the desired state, and an assignment of responsibility. An asterisk (*) indicates those areas for which we believe additional resources (human, structural, or financial) may be required.

1.0 Being OPEN TO ALL

- **1.1. Accessibility:** Our buildings are fully accessible to those with physical needs for all areas used in church activities.
*Responsibility—Trustees**
- **1.2. Diversity:** Our church in word, practice, and worship is reflective of a diverse set of cultures and perspectives. Our congregation, staff, and lay leadership reflect our Greater Rochester community.
*Responsibility—Church Council, SPRC, Hospitality, New Task Force/Committee**
- **1.3. Hospitality:** All who enter Asbury First for any reason (whether worship, programmatic activity, or spiritual or other need) encounter a unique sense of warmth and welcome within our community.
Responsibility—Hospitality, Staff, Leadership

2.0 WORSHIP

- **2.1. Attendance:** Our weekly worship attendance is at 1,000, an increase of approximately fifty percent from 2017.
Responsibility—Worship and the Arts, Communication Team, Hospitality
- **2.2. Technology:** Our worship experience is faithfully expanded through digital media.
Responsibility—Technology, Worship and Arts, Communication Team

3.0 COMMUNITY

- **3.1. Connection:** All who desire one have a place within the Asbury First community beyond worship.
*Responsibility—Discipleship, Communication Team, Church Council, Volunteer Coordinator**

- **3.2. Care:** People within our Asbury First community receive the right care at the right time in the right place.
Responsibility—Staff, Congregational Care
- **3.3 Communication:** Information is communicated effectively to all audiences inside and outside our community.
Responsibility—Communication Team, Church Council, Staff, Technology*

4.0 OUTREACH

- **4.1. Strategy Alignment:** The Outreach Taskforce report, “A Way Forward” has been faithfully implemented.
Responsibility—Outreach, Church Council, SPRC, Pastors

5.0 DISCIPLESHIP

- **5.1. Faith Development:** A clear pathway for discipleship is available for all in our community.
Responsibility—Discipleship, Pastors
- **5.2. Celebration:** We grow our faith through the celebration of life’s rites of passage together.
Responsibility—Discipleship, Staff, Communication Team

6.0 GENEROSITY

- **6.1. Time:** All members of our community volunteer in some way (either within our Asbury First community or outside our community).
Responsibility—Leadership, Volunteer Coordinator, Technology*
- **6.2. Talent:** All members of our community are able to use their talents and leadership abilities within our community to serve others.
Responsibility—Nominations, Volunteer Coordinator, Program Staff*
- **6.3. Treasure:** All members of our community give financially (and pledge) to Asbury First as they are able with many members tithing.
Responsibility—Stewardship, Planned Giving

7.0 STEWARDSHIP

- **7.1. Endowment:** Our endowment is currently at \$10M.
Responsibility—Trustees, Planned Giving
- **7.2. Capital Improvements:** A 15-year revolving plan and process is in place to manage capital improvements.
Responsibility—Trustees
- **7.3. Structure and Systems:** Our structure and systems are organized in a missionally effective way.
Responsibility—Church Council, Leadership, Technology, SPRC

E. Living the Dream – an Implementation Plan

If we accept this Dreamscape, the mission, vision, and values of Asbury First will be officially updated. All church materials will be updated, and unique communication strategies will be created to explain this work for future Asbury First visitors and members.

This plan will be integrated into our existing committee structure. The Church Council will assume the leadership for and ownership of this plan, and ensure responsible parties (indicated within the goals themselves) are able to achieve their respective goal. New data recording and reporting mechanisms will be developed, and annual committee, volunteer, and staff reports will reflect progress on these goals.

To that end, all responsible parties will develop action plans—possibly spanning several years, but no longer than five years—to bring these dreams to life. These action plans will include current state evaluations with projected targets for set increments of time. The Church Administrator will work with the Church Council and individual groups to shepherd the development of action plans. Some plans have already been developed, but **every responsible group will be expected to complete their action plan no later than January 2018.**

The Dream Team will reconvene in January 2018 to hear an update from Church Council via the Church Administrator on the status of all action plans.

The Dreamscape will be a guiding beacon as we navigate the unknown future. It will become the ruler by which we measure decisions and how we know if we have been successful in *loving God and neighbor, living fully, and serving all*. Our prayer is that, by God's grace, this Dreamscape will permeate all layers of our community, embolden us to *do more good*, and provide a foundation for the next 200 years of faithful ministry at Asbury First.