



## 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 Practice. They completed Pillars 1 (leadership) and 5 (culture of learning) individually and then came together to discuss their ratings and rationale for each of the



### Southview Community Church

Location: Herndon, VA

Field: Religion

Budget: <\$1 million

“ The Performance Practice 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

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 Performance Practice 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 conversa-



tions 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 Performance Practice 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.

*Photos in this story provided by Southview Community Church.*

#### Performance in Action

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