

## Transition Team Summarization

### Cottage Meetings

14 meetings held

Total Attendance: 115

#### Cottage Meetings

A series of meetings were held in homes for members of the church. 115 people took part in the meetings (which also included the members of the Transition Team and staff persons who are members.) Each meeting focused on engendering friendly discussions about joys/aches, what is valued now and what must be maintained, what is most important in the next pastor and what can each member do to be supportive of the ministry of the church. A secondary (but equally significant) aspect of these small gatherings in homes is the conversation, fellowship and good will that is so crucial to healing in a congregation that is recovering from polarization. There is no way to summarize that – nor should there be. Suffice it to say that feedback from participants was positive and that just attending and sharing went a long way toward personal and congregational healing.

As one might expect there were many different answers to each question. In a church this size that is very diverse the entire gamut of opinions on any question were found. But as one would also expect general significant themes and points emerged from meeting to meeting, from group to group. Every idea is not represented here, only the ones expressed on a recurring basis.

The first two questions were designed to elicit responses to the underlying issue of “what do you value: that we already have and/or should have. The first question was “*If First Congregational were to \_\_\_\_\_, I would run out and tell my best friend(s) “You’ve got to come and see what’s going on at my church.”* The top three responses here could be seen in terms of (1) close relationships (Christ Care, approachable pastor, and a respectful loving family atmosphere.) (2) More programmatic issues (emphasize music, mission, youth and reorganization of church structures.) One would have expected issues around worship to come up more often in this wording of the “values” question as it is often mentioned that more “contemporary” worship is needed, but only 4 specifically mentioned this, although the category (3) was conveying a sense of joy in worship and powerful, vibrant preaching.

Other themes lifted up here were largely around specific ideas about how to attract people, but here too implied in the responses is the assumption that others would value this *because I value it*. Many of the ideas were around fellowship/spiritual growth opportunities and how to engender good relationships.

Question 2 was the via negativa approach to the values question, *If First Congregational were to stop \_\_\_\_\_ I would leave the church.*

The largest response to this was under the larger category of “worshipping God.” It took the form of comments like “worshipping Christ”, “stop preaching/studying the Bible”, “serving God”, “spreading the word of God.” While these are all terms open to interpretation, they all *imply* that the folks responding are experiencing the “worship of God at the present time and that should that stop it could be motivation to leave the church. This speaks well for the church as it is now, but this may need further analysis.

The next two most commonly given responses (22% each) were about the ramifications of allowing missions *and* children/youth ministry to diminish. This response alone would seem to imply that church is equally committed to ministry here (referencing question 1) with all ages and with special emphasis on children/youth (and 6 others who mentioned adult small group ministries) *as well as* our outreach and service as reflected in “hands on” mission like HOME, Pivot, Habitat, Back Bay. A balance of inreach and outreach seems desirable.

The third category that could lead to folks considering leaving is continued stewardship issues. 15% expressed fatigue/disillusionment/frustration with the on-going financial issues and “mistakes”. This would imply some people value the tidy “business” of running an institution.

The next group (11%) felt maintaining diversity and being welcoming was a characteristic that must not be lost. This paired with the most prized issue from Q1 is reflective of the desire for a warm, welcoming, loving “family” here at First Congregational.

Other than education, Music was listed by 7 people as a source of attraction, joy for adults and children and was to be supported and enhanced.

The other category in this area comprised those for whom nothing would make them leave the church – now that’s loyalty!

Question 3 was one that sought to have folks concentrate on what characteristics (other than the world’s greatest preacher) they look for in their next Senior Pastor. One can imagine the wide variety of specifics in the responses to this question. Our suspicion is that each one reflects what respondents felt were the strengths/weaknesses of previous pastors who were either liked or disliked. We tried to group them into areas of personal qualities and leadership style and as these terms are ambiguous at best this is a rough attempt to “lump them together”. The responses do clearly show that personal qualities are far more highly prized here than administrative gifts.

Under the area of personal qualities were

- compassionate/ warm
- honest/integrity/good role model/authentic/sincere/humble
- relates well/good caregiver/inclusive/open-minded
- visionary/aligned with the church's vision/empowers congregation
- sense of humor
- approachable/outgoing/good listener/accessible/respectful
- relates faith to life/Bible-based/good Biblical sense/challenging

Under the leadership style area (although less than 10% of responses were in this area)

- loyalty to congregation
- good fuser
- good administrator
- participates in committee meetings
- leads a mission focus

Question 4 was aimed at eliciting ideas about the personal responsibility each member has for the success of the next pastor and what they *could do*. Assuming that the following is true: *When the pastor thrives, the congregation thrives and when the congregation thrives, the pastor thrives* I could \_\_\_\_\_ to ensure the pastor thrives.

Responses here are clearly divided between those who felt their primary responsibility was to concentrate on their role as a member of the congregation (“continue deep involvement, be part of the life of the church, maintain my commitment, role model ‘helping the cause’”, pray, refrain from criticism, not gossip, etc.). 55% of the ideas presented fell into this area.

Others saw that they could be supportive of the pastor. However, it was interesting that equal numbers felt that to be supportive was to engage, befriend, support, resource, invite, provide psychological support, visit the pastor in the office while others felt that the best way to support the pastor was to realize they're just human, have a personal life, give them space, assess their personal needs not just mine, etc. While these may be at odds, this group of folks combined can be summed up as saying that the needs of the pastor need to be discerned and supported – whatever they may be. A small group saw their role as both being supportive of the pastor as well as active engagement in the life of the congregation. The majority of responses – no matter what approach to helping a “thriving

community” – saw that their actions, and in particular the quality, tone and direction of their criticism/comments/opinions about ministry, the pastor, the church needed to consciously reflect love and care for all parties involved.

#### Overall Summation.

The Cottage meetings indicated that the climate at First Congregational Church in many quarters over the last few years has been difficult. Folks were looking for a light out of that darkness and many saw the key to that a change of heart in the way people (clergy and lay) dealt with one another. People value honesty, integrity, compassion. They seek a leader (and a community) that is open and available. They are fatigued with the internal squabbles and are aware that so much focus on internal matters has affected the outreach and mission sense of the church. They feel that for the church to be a place that new folks would desire to join education, youth, fellowship and small groups must be supported and strengthened as places for real relationship with Christ and one another can develop. The worship of the church must continue to offer dynamic, Biblically centered and relevant preaching, good music and a sense of the holy. (It is interesting that the style of worship and the number of services were blips on the screen as far as importance.)

There is also a recognition that the church needs to be aware of the expectations that a pastor be everything for everybody. Many folks expressed the awareness that a pastor comes with certain gifts – but not all of them. Their commitment to the life of the church recognizes that ministry is collaborative between the pastoral gifts and those within the congregation. Yet, the participants in the cottage meetings were very clear that person-to-person skills were far more critical than those of an administrator.