

Report of the Steering Committee to the Official Board of Cherry Log Christian Church

January 28, 2017

The Steering Committee is comprised of six members of the congregation: Lynn Barrett, Marshall Burke, Caroline Carder, Peggy Cleveland, Luci Coffee, Sharon Meek, and our Interim Minister Paul Pryor. The committee began meeting on October 24, 2016 and has met 8 times since then for a total of 18 hours. During this time the committee has been involved in an intensive learning regimen and discernment process. Using the book “Grace for the Journey” as our guide we have come to a new understanding of who we are as a congregation and what skills and experience we need in our next pastor in order for our congregation to grow and successfully negotiate the changes we will need to make over the course of the next chapter of our corporate life. We want to share these learnings with you, and then, lay out the next steps we believe we need to take as we continue through this process.

Learnings:

1. The first thing we learned was the importance of the “in-between-time” for the future of the church. This time is called “in-between” because we are no longer where we used to be and it isn’t quite clear where we are going. While this not knowing often produces a good deal of anxiety, it can also become a sacred time of discovering new possibilities and directions. It is a time when we need to listen closely for direction from God for the future of our congregation. What we on the Steering Committee learned is that waiting on God takes time; it can’t be rushed. However, waiting on God does not mean we don’t do anything. Instead it is a time for active listening and for paying close attention to things we usually dismiss.
2. The “in-between time gives us an opportunity to do some self-examination. We learned about the three levels of culture that exist in every congregation:
 - a) Artifacts: These are the things we see as we pull into the parking lot and enter the church (paved lot; attractive building; the cars; the people; the sanctuary; the style of worship). Artifacts are the most obvious clues about the deeper cultural values of the congregation.
 - b) Espoused Values: This level of culture is where we state all the positives about ourselves. Espoused values are found in our Constitution and By-laws; our written and oral histories; on our website; etc. They give a fuller picture of who we are but to truly understand the church we have to go deeper.
 - c) Submerged Beliefs: These beliefs are called submerged because they exist below the surface. They are the deeply held convictions that are not usually spoken of but have a tremendous amount of influence in everything we do. Another term to describe them is “underlying assumptions.” Again they are things that we assume everyone knows even though they are

rarely ever discussed. These submerged beliefs came into existence in the life of the congregation as a way of solving a problem. The trouble with them is that in most cases they have long outlived the original problem, and are now creating new problems of their own.

3. **Size Matters:** Another learning we discovered is that different size churches operate in different ways. Our congregation is of a size in which it should be operating as a “program-sized” church. That has deep implications for the skill set we need in our next pastor and the expectations from the congregation for that pastor (See attachment).
4. **Implications for the new pastor:** As we already stated, we believe that we are a program sized church that has been operating with a pastoral size style of leadership. From our study we have learned that the shift from pastoral size to program size is very difficult because of the expectations placed upon the pastor by the congregation. Yet, we have also learned that without this shift, our congregation cannot and will not grow. One pastor can only do so much. Once that limit is reached, the church will begin to decline. While we know that our church cannot afford a second clergy staff person at this time, we need to find ways to deal with the problem until we can add an associate pastor. This is something that the entire congregation needs to understand and begin to grapple with.
5. **Intensive Leadership training:** In our discussions the issue of leadership training within the congregation was identified as an area that needs attention. Recruitment and training are ongoing needs in every congregation, and we are no exception. We have too many people in leadership roles that received little or no training. As a result there is a good deal of confusion about duties in specific areas of responsibility.

Next Steps:

1. **Congregational Meetings:** Beginning next month we will hold meetings with small groups throughout the congregation to pass on these learnings and to solicit input from the congregation about the future of the church and its leadership.
2. **Vision and Mission Statement:** From the information we receive from the congregational meetings we will begin to put together a vision and a mission statement. These will be presented to the congregation for further discussion and approval.
3. **Initiating the Search Committee:** At the point where we believe that we have made enough progress to begin the search process we will recommend to the board that a Search Committee be formed and begin working with our interim minister on how to proceed. We recommend that two of the Steering Committee members be on the Search Committee to insure that the learnings will be incorporated into their process. As the Search Committee goes about their work the remainder of the Steering Committee will continue to meet to work on the final phase of the transition process: preparing for the new pastor.