

Report for Cherry Log Christian Church



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For more information about Cherry Log Christian Church and their work, visit www.clccdoc.org.

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Project Overview

In late January 2012, a leadership team from Cherry Log Christian Church (CLCC), contacted members of the Fanning Institute (FI) faculty at the University of Georgia to request assistance with conflict at the church. Two members of the FI faculty, David Anderson Hooker and Raye Rawls, held a Skype meeting with the CLCC leadership group to learn more about the congregation's hopes, concerns, and the basis for the request. After several iterations and modifications to an initial proposal prepared by FI, the CLCC leadership team agreed to proceed by taking the following steps:

1. **Convene a small leadership/design team** that represents multiple perspectives and experiences in the congregation. Design Team participants would include younger and older members, long-term and shorter-term members, members active in designated or elected leadership posts and those not, and other relevant groups. This team would provide the Fanning Institute with the multiple perspectives of the constituencies and social groups in the church. In addition to sharing multiple perspectives, this design team could create a better sense of shared and diverse project ownership, which is important for project success.
2. With the design team's help, **develop and implement a survey/assessment tool** that seeks to gain the perspectives, hopes, and concerns of an even broader spectrum of the full congregation.
3. Based on the results of the survey/ assessment tool, **develop and implement a focus group engagement experience for two smaller groups of members of CLCC (24 in each group).**

In late April 2012, a leadership/design team was formed and met with the FI faculty. The leadership/design team ultimately came to be called the "Listening Group." The Listening Group and FI faculty worked together to develop a survey that invited assessments and opinions of current and willing past members of the congregation. After extensive consideration, back-and forth communications, and some modification of the survey, the final instrument was completed. In June 2012, the survey was made available through on-line access with print copies available for those who preferred that format. The survey was available for three weeks; 122 people responded to the survey. The comments in the survey were then summarized to become the basis for the questions asked in the two focus groups.

The survey responses are presented below, followed by the findings from the focus groups.

Themes from the Survey

In addition to demographic information, the survey provided information in five categories:

1. Satisfaction with modes of communication
2. Opinions regarding the church's mission
3. Understanding and appreciation of the church's current direction
4. Members' current and desired levels of involvement
5. Perception of church's openness and welcoming attitude

1. Satisfaction with modes of communication:

- a. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the current communications practices within the church.
- b. Survey participants primarily rely on official church communication instruments (e-mail, newsletter, and bulletin) but they also seek out information from a variety of other channels. Participants have an overwhelming stated preference for electronic communication (e-mail and newsletter) as their primary mode of communication.

How do you prefer to receive updated information about/from the church? (Select one from drop down menu below)			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Sunday announcements	7	6.8%	<div><div></div></div>
Sunday bulletin	6	5.8%	<div><div></div></div>
Church webpages	2	1.9%	<div><div></div></div>
Email notices	59	57.3%	<div><div></div></div>
Newsletter (the Cherry Logue)	21	20.4%	<div><div></div></div>
Local newspapers	0	0.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Reports from other members	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
all above sources are fine and working well	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
All the decisions seem to be already made before anyone ever hears the announcement.	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
I appreciate all sources	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Meetings	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Phone and mail	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Prefer periodic discussions in groups in addition to reports from other members. Sometimes information comes late, long after the decisions are made.	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Other	1	1.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	103	100.0%	






(1) Which source(s) do you use to get updated info about/from the church? (Select all that apply)			
	Counts	Percents	Percents 0 100
Sunday announcements	73	64.6%	
Sunday bulletin	82	72.6%	
Church webpages	51	45.1%	
Email notices	89	78.8%	
Newsletter (the CHERRYLOGUE)	94	83.2%	
Local newspapers	13	11.5%	
Reports from other members	63	55.8%	
Attending and hearing announcements	1	0.9%	
committee meetings	1	0.9%	
Complaining members who are half or completely inaccurately giving information.	1	0.9%	
Entered Paper	8	7.1%	
Entered Paper - Friends in the church.	1	0.9%	
Entered Paper Telephone or Mail	1	0.9%	
Facebook page	1	0.9%	
Jim Weiland's prayer/concern emails	1	0.9%	
Meetings	1	0.9%	
Online Prayer List	1	0.9%	
prayer list	1	0.9%	
speaking w/ people	1	0.9%	
Other	0	0.0%	
Totals	*	*	

* Note: Multiple answer percentage-count totals not meaningful.

2. Opinion regarding the church's mission:






Eighty-four percent (84%) of the participants surveyed have either a favorable (75%) or neutral (9%) opinion of the church's mission. While the reasons are wide-ranging, the vast majority of respondents' comments indicated that CLCC's mission is:

- a. Aligned with the larger denomination (Disciples of Christ),
- b. Relevant and appropriate for the current context/location, and
- c. Positioned for positive internal growth and contribution to the community.




(6) What opinions and thoughts do you have about the mission?				
	Counts	Percents	Percents	
			0	100
Highly favorable	52	52.0%		
Somewhat favorable	23	23.0%		
Neutral	9	9.0%		
Somewhat unfavorable	8	8.0%		
Highly unfavorable	8	8.0%		
Totals	100	100.0%		




3. Understanding and appreciation of the church's current direction:




Unlike the predominantly positive response of participants regarding the overall church mission, participants were less favorable in their impression of the current direction of the church. A majority of the membership (54.7%) held favorable opinions concerning the current direction of the church. Possibly as a reflection of the divide in the church that was the impetus for the original engagement, 45.3% of the congregation held either neutral or unfavorable opinions of the direction of the church.




(8) What opinions and thoughts do you have about the direction of CLCC?				
	Counts	Percents	Percents	
			0	100
Highly favorable	37	34.9%		
Somewhat favorable	21	19.8%		
Neutral	9	8.5%		
Somewhat unfavorable	19	17.9%		
Highly unfavorable	20	18.9%		
Totals	106	100.0%		




4. Survey participant's current and desired levels of involvement:
The vast majority of survey participants indicated that they played an active role in the life of the church and engaged with the local community.




Youth and children			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	13	41.9%	
Currently involved	17	54.8%	
Would like to get involved	1	3.2%	
Totals	31	100.0%	



Prayer			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	13	26.5%	
Currently involved	32	65.3%	
Would like to get involved	4	8.2%	
Totals	49	100.0%	



Preparing communion			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	12	40.0%	
Currently involved	16	53.3%	
Would like to get involved	2	6.7%	
Totals	30	100.0%	




Greeting people on Sunday morning			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	17	45.9%	
Currently involved	16	43.2%	
Would like to get involved	4	10.8%	
Totals	37	100.0%	




Wednesday Night			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	27	51.9%	
Currently involved	20	38.5%	
Would like to get involved	5	9.6%	
Totals	52	100.0%	

Special services			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	19	36.5%	
Currently involved	29	55.8%	
Would like to get involved	4	7.7%	
Totals	52	100.0%	

Friday Prayer			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	11	45.8%	
Currently involved	13	54.2%	
Would like to get involved	0	0.0%	
Totals	24	100.0%	

Fellowship after church			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	29	34.5%	
Currently involved	55	65.5%	
Would like to get involved	0	0.0%	
Totals	84	100.0%	

Sunday School			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	24	37.5%	
Currently involved	38	59.4%	
Would like to get involved	2	3.1%	
Totals	64	100.0%	

Structured small groups			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	23	35.9%	
Currently involved	34	53.1%	
Would like to get involved	7	10.9%	
Totals	64	100.0%	




Outreach - Local area (30 miles)			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Involved in the past	17	29.8%	<div><div></div></div>
Currently involved	36	63.2%	<div><div></div></div>
Would like to get involved	4	7.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	57	100.0%	




Supporting Local groups (AA, DFACS)			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Involved in the past	5	17.2%	<div><div></div></div>
Currently involved	21	72.4%	<div><div></div></div>
Would like to get involved	3	10.3%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	29	100.0%	




Regional outreach			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Involved in the past	9	31.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Currently involved	19	65.5%	<div><div></div></div>
Would like to get involved	1	3.4%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	29	100.0%	




World missions			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Involved in the past	6	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Currently involved	18	75.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Would like to get involved	0	0.0%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	24	100.0%	




Choir, bells, chorale			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Involved in the past	2	5.4%	<div><div></div></div>
Currently involved	33	89.2%	<div><div></div></div>
Would like to get involved	2	5.4%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	37	100.0%	

Committees and projects			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	27	33.3%	
Currently involved	52	64.2%	
Would like to get involved	2	2.5%	
Totals	81	100.0%	

Helping others one on one			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	20	30.8%	
Currently involved	43	66.2%	
Would like to get involved	2	3.1%	
Totals	65	100.0%	

Informal groups such as bridge, movie, men's groups, book groups			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	11	24.4%	
Currently involved	31	68.9%	
Would like to get involved	3	6.7%	
Totals	45	100.0%	

Disciple Women			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	12	52.2%	
Currently involved	8	34.8%	
Would like to get involved	3	13.0%	
Totals	23	100.0%	

Faith stories from members			
	Counts	Percents	0 Percents 100
Involved in the past	8	50.0%	
Currently involved	4	25.0%	
Would like to get involved	4	25.0%	
Totals	16	100.0%	

5. Perception of church's openness and welcoming attitude:

When asked to rate the overall receptivity and hospitality of the congregation towards differences of opinion, perspective, or culture, the congregation was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the congregation stated that they found the congregation somewhat or very open and inclusive.

This is a remarkable accomplishment considering the current climate in the church and the range of political and theological views represented within the congregation. The focus groups (discussed below) provide a different perspective of this issue and an open and free exchange of information. However, there seems to be a sense of communal pride associated with and deep hope invested in this attribute of congregational openness and inclusion.

(12) How would you rate the overall receptivity/hospitality of CLCC, in terms of being welcoming, hospitable and receptive of all people?			
	Counts	Percents	<div> <div></div> <div>0</div> <div>100</div> </div>
Very open/inclusive	82	73.2%	<div><div></div></div>
Somewhat open/inclusive	21	18.8%	<div><div></div></div>
Neutral	4	3.6%	<div><div></div></div>
Somewhat closed/exclusive	3	2.7%	<div><div></div></div>
Very closed/exclusive	2	1.8%	<div><div></div></div>
Totals	112	100.0%	

Themes from Focus Group Sessions

IDENTITY

What we want	What we struggle with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian love without judgment • Rise above petty matters to focus on service to others • Welcome all points of view and not make people feel marginalized • Inclusion, respect, and acceptance are important values • Teaching Jesus is a common goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to have unity of membership with such diversity • Around what issues and core beliefs can we unify? • How can all points of view be welcomed if some points of view are limiting? • TOO POLITICAL—how do we agree to differ? When there are differences, what is the deciding factor for decision-making? If it is a majority, then how will those in the minority groups not feel dismissed? How can minority viewpoints get not only a hearing but also a say? • Contradiction between “all being the same” and accepting diversity. Does accepting diversity eliminate it?

Key Question: Since the Disciples of Christ denomination allows for multiple spiritual paths and doesn’t adhere to one theological perspective on the Bible, diversity is expected. How can the church deal with that diversity?

Needs: A safe way to discuss differences that validates those differences without dismissing them, and allows the members to learn and grow, respecting the various gifts, talents, and points of view that each member brings to the congregation.

STRUCTURE

What we want	What we struggle with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciples of Christ (DOC) structures to be taught, lived, and believed in • Reinstate formal class to prepare visitors and new members • Clarify what being a member (both active and inactive) entails (attendance, giving, declaration of faith) • Training to leaders specific to their leadership positions, then leave them alone and let them lead • Better understanding of roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems are not with structure but with relationships • Clarity on governing structure: recently revised church by-laws creates a broader base of leadership roles, putting more decision-making authority in the hands of three councils, creating a more functional democracy • This speaks to concern over one person leading the church without of congregational input

Key Question: Does DOC structure allow the pastor to lead changes? What role does the congregation have in influencing and determining decisions regarding church activities and business?

Needs: Regain confidence that the congregation (including the leadership) understands and adheres to the DOC structure. This need is less about structural understanding and more about trust and confidence in the abilities of leaders.

COMMUNICATION

What we want	What we struggle with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church has great communication through a variety of outlets; those not getting it are not paying attention • Transparency and consistency in communication; concern over secrecy • Communication plan depends on clear hierarchy of leadership and decision-making processes, along with the critical components of trust and honesty • Everyone has a say but no single individual gets his or her way — so less majority rule and more consensus building • Leaders need to be trained to model appropriate open and transparent communication to flock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With diversity and a number of “segments” of the congregation focusing on their ministry concerns, how do you balance information overload with getting people the information they want and need? • Fear of secrets and elitist information dissemination • Despite the variety of useful communication outlets in place, some members feel like some critical information is being withheld and spreading through less trustworthy channels

Key Question: Who needs to know what and when? And how is it best delivered?

Needs: Trust and confidence in the congregation to follow a communication plan.

LEADERSHIP

What we want	What we struggle with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pastor who is inclusive of all members and pastors everyone • Trusting those in leadership positions rather than feeling the need to control them • Ability to empower and support others • Patience, compassion, and transparency at all levels • Not about power and control but about service to the congregation • Consensus on the source of sermons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A leadership that focuses more on controlling the congregation than showing compassion to the congregation • A leadership of the few rather than the many; looking for more involvement of committee leadership, not just one person

Key Question: How can a leader lead in the face of such diversity and lack of consensus on how to address all segments of the membership?

Needs: Restore trust and confidence in leadership.

Summary of findings

Although the survey results from the larger congregation shows an overall satisfaction with the church in terms of communication, current mission, involvement of members, and members' perception of the church as open and receptive of all people, nearly half were dissatisfied with the current direction of the church. These specific concerns were explored in more depth by the focus group involving a smaller group of church members (two groups of 24). Although the focus group discussion concerned four specific topics, namely the church's identity, the structure of the church, the church's communication plan, and the leadership of the church, all of the resulting conversations were related to restoring trust and confidence in relationships within the church. The following recommendations are focused on activities to rebuild trust, confidence, and relationships within a safe and secure environment in order to strengthen the church community, as well as provide the skills necessary to deal with future conflict.



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