

**Community Discernment Summary**  
**June 9, 2019**  
**Session 1: Core Values**

Following worship on June 9, twenty-two people participated in the first community discernment session. This session explored the congregation's core values.

The participants divided into five small groups to discuss three questions:

1. Identify a Jesus story which best describes TCC
2. If someone asked you why he or she would want to come to this church, what would you tell that person? What makes Trinitarian Congregational Church unique?
3. Given this present time in the life of TCC, identify the three most pressing issues facing the congregation and rank them in order from first, most pressing, to third, least pressing

**Results**

Question 1:

Several stories emerged accompanied with sometimes passionate commentary articulating the why for that particular story. The following themes emerged:

- Food
- Healing
- Acceptance and not prone to hierarchy
- Caring
- Supportive
- Love as an organizing principle for all that we do
- Work hard

Three stories seemed to capture TCC's identity:

- Parable of the good Samaritan
- Feeding of the 5000
- Mary and Martha

Question 2:

People raised many observations and qualities:

- We don't have a Sunday School
- We have excellent funeral receptions
- Our values are:
  - Acceptance
  - Quality worship leadership, especially music
  - Equality and parity (tend to not to put people above or below others)
- Strong spiritual values
- We are a community institution
  - Providing spiritual comfort
  - Crossing generations (Though we don't have many children, other than the library, we potentially can be another community institution to provide a place for this to happen)

- Missions
- Family
- A place of refuge, a place where one can find peace
- We learn how to help others
- Accept our task for doing things in the community

Though these are all very good, many churches see themselves in the same way. Furthermore, people who are not affiliated with any church often do not and cannot make a distinction between different churches.

The task ahead should force us to condense these characteristics into a short “sort of bumper sticker” summary. While it could be a mission statement, it doesn’t have to be. It should be, however, a succinct description of TCC which sets it apart from other congregations

Question 3:

Each group reported on what it believed to be the three most pressing issues facing the congregation and presented ranked from most pressing to least pressing.

Group 1

- Membership. We don’t have many youth and should have more male participation
- Money
- More community use of our facility. An example: Have a youth theater

Group 2

- Pastoral leadership to work with us and guide us
- Attendance
- Financial
- We need more fun activities

Group 3

- Families. We need to appeal to and have more participation across all ages
- Financial
- Part-time pastor. We need full-time ministry

Group 4

- Declining membership
- Financial sustainability
- Community Outreach

Group 5

- We’re no different than any other church (Unpacking this further, the group believed if we can distinguish ourselves, then the other issues such as declining membership and finances will take care of themselves.)

Though wanting youth is desirable, the reality is that Northfield is a demographically older community. About a third of the population is over 65. Pursuing youth, although possible, will also change the character of the congregation so that it might not feel like “your church.” As the congregation’s present demographic is aging, it will compromise the congregation’s capacity to continue present activities indefinitely. (In a moment of levity, we acknowledged that our funeral receptions become appealing.)

Two pressing issues emerged: Finances and membership

The building costs seriously strain the current budget. Based upon the current budget, the building takes a little over 17% of the allocations. Some noted that it could be higher if we include the sexton’s compensation as part of the building costs. In a healthy budget, the building should not exceed 10% of the allocations. Staff salaries are at the very high end of allocations in a healthy church budget.

We did not address the building costs in any formal way. We will begin discussions, however, among leadership.

### **Final Thoughts**

The discussions were honest and thoughtful. One person commented that a lot of what we said was about “what was” and that we need to start looking ahead. We also noted that presently there is enough capacity in the congregation to think clearly what lies ahead and that forging a new path will require putting resources to it.

We might characterize the session as a reality check. Some informal conversations following the session indicate that there are potential possibilities to explore.

### **To Do**

- Develop a succinct description of TCC to set it apart from other churches
- Think about the future, not the past, and be willing to entertain how to use our facilities for the community.

**Next Community  
Discernment Session:  
July 14**