

Discernment Session 2:
July 14, 2019

Summary: About 25 people attended this session, including several people from the Ridge community. We began around 11:30 AM and concluded around 12:45 PM. We divided into four groups ranging from five to 8 people.

We covered three questions:

1. Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.
2. Name three challenges or opportunities in Northfield that need to be addressed.
3. How is God calling you to respond as a congregation?

History/Identity

Group 1:

- Becoming ONA in 2018
- The Fire (brought the congregation together as a church and extended its outreach into the community)
- Within the past 10 years. Retirement of a long-time pastor and changes in pastoral leadership forced the congregation to do things differently

Group 2:

- Moody Influence – Ridge Sunday
- Within the past 10 years: Retirement of a long-time pastor
- Loss of Sunday School

Group 3:

- Retirement of long-time pastor
- The Fire
- Though we have no Sunday School, we still have a choir

Group 4:

- Retirement of long-time pastor
- Fire
- Within past 10 years: Cultural shift away from church.
- No Sunday School
- Closing of the Greenfield Baptist Church

Challenges:

Group 1:

- Northfield needs new businesses. We need a gas station
- Need more volunteers for town committees
- Build better relations with Ridge residents – there are needs on the Ridge
- Senior housing

Group 2:

- Food insecurity
- Food pantry in the library is too small and needs to be open more hours
- Affordable housing
- Aging water districts
- Is there a shortage of farm workers due to immigration policies?

Group 3:

- Public transportation
- Water and sewer
- Declining tax base and diminished economic and job opportunities
- Losing the younger generation as there is no reason to stay

Group 4:

- Water system
- Need more businesses in town – try to broaden the town’s appeal for recreation and tourism opportunities
- Schools (problems related of finances): Impact of regionalization, loss of some services due to finances and declining enrollment

Respond:

Group 1:

Become a member of the Mission Committee

Increase involvement within the church and the wider community

Collaborative projects with other churches

Try to bring diverse groups in Northfield together who are working on similar problems, but are stymied by scheduling issues

Grandparents raising their grandchildren

Weekly column from the clergy

Group 2:

Reaching out to existing organizations in town to support their respective missions

Provide space to community organizations

Group 3:

Ridge people need more help than once a month. Connect them to organizations in the community

Work with local technical schools do provide home repairs

Help with housing/keep people in their homes

Convert older housing stock to rentals
Monthly community dinners
Open the food pantry more than twice a month

Group 4:

Community Thanksgiving dinner with all the churches to build ecumenical relationships as a goodwill gesture

Closing remarks:

- We're aging. Is this realistic to think we can do what we've been suggesting?
- Consider renting out the church
- Creating senior housing will take time
- Who will make the Thanksgiving dinner?
- Do we have capacity to do this work?
- We put a lot of energy into fundraising for the church. We should redirect that energy into outreach. We should stop special fundraising for mission and make it part of the budget
- Needs on the Ridge are larger than we know
- How do we connect with other congregations? Northfield had a time when its clergy typically got together.
- Have the Thanksgiving dinner bring in local businesses for their participation