

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL OF DEACONS FROM THE DISCERNMENT MINISTRY TEAM SUMMARIZING THE RESULTS OF THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

1. SUMMARY OF INSTRUMENTS:

Despite the fact that the discernment process allowed for an evolution of information, engagement and thought, there is a surprisingly high correlation between the survey results, the house meeting discussions, and the congregational meeting of October 25, 2009.

A. Strengths:

- i. Worship
- ii. The desire for authentic community
- iii. Ministers
- iv. Education (Adult, Youth, Children)
- v. Mission work (local and global)
- vi. Music
- vii. Plant

B. Opportunities:

- i. Clarifying Our Vision
- ii. Spirituality, through:
 1. Worship
 2. Music
 3. Identify/use spiritual gifts
 4. In everyday life
 5. Education
- iii. Nurturing Our Sense of Community:
 1. Welcoming guests
 2. Integrating new members
 3. Following-up with members
 4. Caring for the membership, especially the elderly and infirmed
- iv. Reaching Out:
 1. To the community for membership
 2. To the community offering programming
 3. To the community offering service
 4. To the world offering service

C. Obstacles

- i. Lack of a clear vision
- ii. Finances:
 1. Individual generosity to the church
 2. The presence of our endowment
 3. Not understanding stewardship as a spiritual practice

Obstacles, cont.

- iii. The lack of knowledge about:
 - 1. Our own spiritual gifts and how to use them
 - 2. Opportunities for members' involvement, especially service
 - 3. How to become engaged as a new member
- iv. Fear of:
 - 1. Controversy
 - 2. Taking sides
 - 3. Discussing homosexuality
 - 4. Being honest
- v. Reluctance to committed, long-term volunteerism and lay leadership

D. God Is Calling First Church To:

- i. Develop a clear, strong vision and mission.
- ii. Focus on spiritual growth that leads us to:
 - 1. Being a high commitment church
 - 2. Being active in outreach and mission in both the congregation and the world
 - 3. Taking stands on issues of social justice
 - 4. Being open to persons of all sexual orientation.
- iii. Nurture community and grow the membership of the church.
- iv. Balance our worship, our service, our finances, and our spiritual development between caring for ourselves and caring for the world.

2. **IDENTITY INDICATORS:** (see related questions below)

- A. We maintain a good balance between Historic and Contemporary traditions.
- B. We want a balance between serving ourselves and serving the world.
- C. The congregation is currently loose-knit; few people experience authentic Christian community.
- D. Movement is toward a larger church.
- E. Movement is toward a higher commitment church.
- F. We have a strong Progressive theology (Definition of Progressive Theology: Upholding the centrality of Jesus/scripture in his/its cultural context and allowing it to both inform and transform individuals, the church, and the culture.)
- G. A stance toward social justice that balances education and activism.
- H. Movement is toward taking stands on issues of social justice.
- I. Movement is toward being open to people of any sexual orientation
- J. First Church is a member of the United Church of Christ (UCC)
- K. Partnerships are important to us (which differs from our recent history)
- L. Important value/culture words that appear multiple times in multiple instruments:
Safe place, accepting, diversity, progressive, inclusive, questioning, journey, sharing, evolving, non-judgmental, spiritual

3. **ISSUES NO LONGER ON THE TABLE/NO NEED FOR DISCUSSION:**

- A. Questions/fear about the O/A Process: we will move forward (spectrum)
- B. Questions of conservative/liberal: Guide and touchstone will be Jesus (all indicators)
- C. Questions of our relationship to UCC: We will continue to be in covenant (survey, HM)
- D. Whether we need to clarify our vision/mission: No question that we must (all indicators)
- E. Whether we are theologically progressive: No question that we are (all indicators)

4. **QUESTIONS TO ANSWER MOVING FORWARD:**

- A. What does it mean to be larger? 850? 900? 1000? 1200? 2000?
- B. What does it mean to take stands on issues of social justice? Congregational votes? Committee responsibilities? Individual activism? Political lobbying?
- C. What does it mean to be a high commitment church? (Definition: tithing, weekly worship, giving significant time/talents/energy, spiritual development) How do we support this and assess it?
- D. What does it mean and what does it look like to be balanced between serving our congregation and serving the world?
- E. What tradition(s) do we need to keep alive?
- F. What is our vision of authentic Christian community?

5. **OVERALL IMPRESSION/SUGGESTION:**

Without sounding too cliché or simplistic, it is fascinating that when all is correlated we indicate that the ancient formula of **Loving God** (spirituality), **Loving Neighbor** (service and outreach) and **Loving Self** (nurturing community) is all of central importance to the collective membership of First Church. It is suggested that this observation not only be incorporated into any mission and vision work we do, but we also consider using The Phoenix Affirmations as a resource for theological reflection and action. It is a uniquely progressive document that is organized under those three categories and uses the multiple words from 2.m. (above) with conviction.