

Summarized Results of Session Listening Circles*

West Side Presbyterian Church, Seattle WA

February 2017

Introduction

In November 2016 the session of West Side Presbyterian Church (WSPC) called for the formation of Listening Circles in order to assess the congregation's readiness to begin the Church Mission study and to ascertain the feelings and perceptions of the current life and ministry of WSPC to date.

Ten Listening Circles were organized for different times, dates, and locations. Six circles met on site at the church. Additionally, one met off site with youth leaders, one met with new members, one met at The Kenney, and the final circle took place at a joint Elder Deacon meeting. Each Listening Circle was attended by at least two ruling elders. Elders asked prepared questions and encouraged open discussion. A relatively small number of the congregation participated which represented about 30% of our average worship attendance.

A team of three ruling elders, a member of the church staff, and the associate pastor were tasked by session to review the raw data recorded by the ruling elders and look for reoccurring themes in the responses. Each team member wrote a summary of their findings and included a paragraph or two about their own assessments garnered from the raw data.

Key Findings Summarized

- Respondents felt that they would like to see much more communication with regards to all issues going on in the church. Respondents felt that there is insufficient communication with regards to the church's interim period and transition time. Related to this issue is one of transparency by the Session. This has contributed a lack of trust.
- Respondents expressed an ardent support for the continuation of WSPC's strong tradition of Biblical preaching and teaching and of Biblical orthodoxy.
- Respondents expressed a deep desire for, and the importance of, unity and community of the church. There is a strong feeling of seeing WSPC as a "family." There is a concern of the perceived exodus of congregants.
- Respondents voiced their views of perceived changes (e.g. worship format, staffing, program offerings, etc.) both positively and negatively. The data suggests 43% of the respondents are open to changes, 24% are neutral, 22% are finding change challenging, 9% say change is too slow, and 2% say it is too fast.

- Respondents voiced lingering and/or unresolved concerns clustering around denominational affiliation with the PC (USA), the Seattle Presbytery, the Fellowship Community, and staff turnover/changes.
- Respondents frequently articulated the desire for relevancy. We understand this to mean taking care to make Biblical truth of the Gospel accessible to all. This impacts our work and ministry in the community.
- Respondents were generally appreciative of the listening circles and hoped that more of this kind of conversation would continue in the future.

Recommendations

- Each Sunday identify specific elders to be available for listening and conversation after the worship services.
- Periodically have forums/listening circles/coffee chats with the congregation updating the congregation of the process and progress being made on a variety of fronts in this interim time. Allow time for Q & A.
- Establish a communication mechanism in which congregants can submit questions or concerns (signed with contact information) to Session.
- Road Map Working Group move ahead with making recommendations to session a. how to conduct the Church Mission Study and b. form the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- Fellowship Working Group attend the national gathering and a. recommend to session how to form a mission affinity group, and b. communicate with the congregation about the Fellowship Community.
- Continue to highlight ministry events which encourage the WSPC family to spend time together in intergenerational/all-church activities, programs, discipleship, outreach and fellowship.

Motions for Session Consideration

1. Adopt the recommendations and publish the results of the Session Listening Circles.
2. Call for Congregation Conversations to take place during the middle hour on the second Sunday of March, April, May, and June to communicate key issues in the life of the church with members and friends of West Side.

3. Establish an on-site and a digital means for the congregation to offer comment such as:
 - a) “Sunday Elders” in the narthex, and
 - b) an email account session@wspc.org to invite comment, including name and contact information.

4. Review upcoming ministry events to ensure West Side host intergenerational opportunities at least once a quarter. Offer childcare to support key initiatives as needed.

*Session adopted the Summarized Results of Session Listening Circles with its recommendations and motions on March 7, 2017.