

## Addendum to the Mission Study Report

As we listened and wrote copious notes during the “focus group” sessions, we heard many things that we think will be helpful to both Session and the Pastor Nominating Committee as they carry out their work. I have attempted to capture the comments and to relay them to you in a manner that gives them a bit of structure. Though these comments did not seem to be necessary to our Mission Study report, they seem to be strongly held views of Westminsterites.

### **Overall view of the Mission Study for its description of the church.**

Most thought the document reflected the church. Most of those who did not, thought it focused too heavily on certain areas though there was not consensus on where it was too heavily focused. Areas mentioned included:

The arts and the Art Festival

Mission outreach (service- not evangelism)

Others thought the study left out areas important to the congregations including fellowship, youth, ministry and worship. Some thought it didn't highlight our lack of diversity enough.

In all, as we listened to the answers to this question, most of the roughly 80 participants thought it reflected their church. A few thought it was a bit too rosy!

Next we discussed the goals delineated in the AI document to determine if these were still accurate.

#### 1. Increasing Community Outreach:

Healthy discussions occurred about “community outreach” - is it service toward community needs or is it more traditional evangelism. The majority of discussion around this involved a listing of community needs that we could be addressing but are not, ways that we could do more. As an editorial note, this was all presented amidst a strong feeling that 20% of our members do 80% of the work and that those folks are very tired. I can honestly say that when I read the list of committees and activities that was compiled by Ginny and Diane for inclusion in the report, I was exhausted just reading how many things we as a congregation are doing.

#### 2. Expanding Spiritual Growth Opportunities for all ages

Discussion on this goal revolved around the word “expanding”. A few thought continuing was fine- that there is no need to expand. Most others talked passionately about feeling that there is nothing offered that really challenges them in the way they would like to be challenged, we have nothing that really nurtures and cares for that 20% that is getting burned out, how are we teaching members and especially our youth to grow spiritually and be involved in the work of the church. Several members mentioned the need for worship in general and sermons to be educational and challenging. It was also noted that many opportunities are hidden to new attenders as they are sort of cliques that you have to know someone involved to access- these include Bible and other book study groups.

### 3. Attracting and retaining young people and families

Again this created quite a bit of discussion. Nearly everyone believed that the future of Westminster is dependent on attracting and retaining younger folks. The discussion really centered on whether we are willing to make the kind of change (rock music, non-Sunday morning worship, thriving small group ministry) that will be needed to accomplish this. Many thought we give this lip service but do not commit the resources needed to accomplish it. In this discussion, the lack of diversity was raised and it is called out as an important issue that needs to be addressed. As an editorial comment, I think it is essential to have a young person on the PNC, particularly someone who was not raised in our church, to bring a perspective on what attracts young families and what are our current structures that make involvement difficult for young families (lack of child care at events, Sunday morning worship times...)

Next we asked for feedback on the 4 values listed:

**Compassion: We treasure our reputation as a warm and welcoming congregation. We have a heart for service.**

We heard many comments about how welcoming we are- most were counter to our image of ourselves as welcoming! Few disagreed with the statement that we treasure this reputation. Many had concerns that we do not live it. For those who felt unwelcome, it was a very emotional issue, sharing how no one spoke to them in their early weeks attending. In this discussion, we again heard of areas that we should be addressing through service that we are not (homelessness, hunger, alienation, racism, mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, isolation, suicide).

**Connection: We value connection amongst members and regular attenders with an emphasis on community.**

From the paragraph above, you can see that this is an area that presents challenges as we move forward. Many feel very connected and the longer you are around, the more connected you feel. Newcomers, on the other hand, report that we are a tough place to crack! As we talked about connection, members brought up the need for us to return to the inter-faith and interdenominational efforts that we once had- Thanksgiving eve services with the synagogue, a connection to the AME Zion church including a pulpit and choir exchange. We have many areas for connecting that we once did better than we do now.

**Cultivating: Christian growth through a strong educational program is central to the life of Westminster.**

Again, folks were nearly unanimous in the believe that Christian education was very important. As is described in section 2 above, there was much discussion about aspiration versus reality. Some feel strongly that we have many things offered and they are central. Others stated that they are not sure if this is truly central to the life. My view was that these folks would like it to

be more central. Again, it was also suggested that there be a stronger emphasis on what are the responsibilities of church membership for youth and adults. Frequently, the word inspiring was used. Westminsterites do not want to spend their time in education that does not push them to grow.

**Creativity: Celebrating gifts of creativity in its various art forms, caring for God's creation in both people and the earth.**

As you will have seen, this section was rewritten to focus on Westminster's expression of God's gift of creativity. In the feedback, the initial section was too long in that it was the longest but didn't make clear sense. The rewrite is better and incorporates some of the suggestions. Others included recognizing the many creative ways that we live together as a congregation- we have had creative worship including interpretive dance and drama, we encourage creativity of members to share musical talents in special music and we include children in this, we have a great craft "make and take" advent event where everyone is an artist! Creative solutions to challenges was also expressed but I failed to capture details.

**Mission Statement:**

Finally, the mission statement. Most groups felt that Jesus needed to be added. Much discussion centered around if folks like the "we" statements, the "to" statements, or the "ing" forms of the word. Few thought we had chosen the wrong words. There was concern raised that the small group preparing this document did not have the authority to draft a mission statement for the church. It is our assumption that a churchwide process will happen early in the tenure of the new pastor that will test and tweak these words. Your Mission Study team stands by them in their thoughtful review of the history, the AI work and the current programming of Westminster.

**Concluding thoughts**

We heard many comments about what we are looking for in our next pastor and I will list them. It was not in the scope of the Mission Study to draft a job description or define traits that are needed. That is the work of the PNC. I think it is important for the Session and the PNC to have these comments as they accomplish their work.

A teaching pastor

A pastor who is involved in Presbytery

A pastor who utilizes study leave to keep current with Biblical and theological scholarship

A pastor who inspires us to grow and respond to the call to service

Attention to inclusivity and social justice- willingness to engage

[Sermons that challenge us to grow spiritually, to broaden our outlook beyond our traditional "church" or "religious" beliefs, and to acknowledge, openly discuss and act on social, economic, and legal justice issues. I would like to see forthright discussion of these issues from our next pastor] that was a slightly edited quote.