

Conversation Circles: Summary of Findings

Session and the search team would like to express our gratitude to those who participated in our conversation circles. The active engagement and thoughtful contributions made these circles very productive. We received excellent feedback from Jennifer Crow and her team, she commented that this was the best she had conducted! The results we achieved were not only encouraging but also a testament to the power of open dialogue and collaboration. The results are attached below.

What has been this church's purpose from founding to present day?

There may be several, or there may be one major purpose that has persisted.

***Why this Question?** Considering what is active in the church's daily life (past and present) grounds a congregation. It reminds them of their original purpose and interests, connects those to what has evolved currently, and provides great material to build the bridge toward a reasonable and achievable future. As an excellent grounding for the other two questions that follow, we find it wise to keep these elements in mind when moving through the journey. Notice that we consolidated individual responses into overarching categories.*

BEING AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY OF FAITH; TO CREATE A CULTURE OF FAITH

- Celebrating and spreading God's faith and love
- Constantly reformed and always reforming in accordance with God's call
- Teaching, studying the Bible, and learning (i.e.: Women's Bible Study, etc.)
- Developing disciples of Christ
- Making decisions based in faith and guided by the Holy Spirit
- Collaborating with other spiritual traditions (i.e.: Mt. Zion and Temple Israel)

POSITIONING ITSELF TO ANTICIPATE AND EMBRACE CHANGE

- Changing our physical structure to respond to God's calling and current needs
- Embracing the possibilities of our location (urban/inner city) in service to others
- Honoring our 200-year history – spanning from being a historical place to worship as “planted” to now being an integral part of the aging inner city as Canton has expanded and changed.
- Balancing emerging perspectives with tradition (liturgist, liturgy)

SERVING THE NEEDS OF OUR CONGREGATION, NEIGHBORS, CITY, AND THE WORLD

- Ministering/Serving internally (all levels of the church: members/friends)
 - Supporting families, children, youth – and all segments – of the congregation
- Ministering/Serving externally (Stephen's Ministry, Blessing Bags, Prayer, etc.), finding external approaches with online service options
- Embracing Social Justice
- Reaching out, inviting in; evangelizing
 - Bringing and Celebrating God's word, faith, and love to others
 - Showing up as God's people in Canton; showing kindness to others
- Embracing Missional activities such as but not limited to:
 - Feeding McKinley School Band, Food Ministries, TIQVAH, Camp Wakonda, Madrigals and Merlot (reaching out into secular world)

YOU EXPRESSED A FEW NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE TO:

- Maintain a vibrant ministry of music and worship
- Offer hope in a post-Christian society
- Appreciating/Accessing/Caring for nature; supporting/creating “green” initiatives
- Be more culturally sensitive and inclusive, especially for newcomers and/or visitors. Remove barriers by more consciously offering cultural/liturgical/informational explanations to worship practices, liturgical moments, faith doctrines and other Presbyterian-specific elements that regular members likely take for granted but that may confuse visitors or newcomers and lead to a feeling of being out of place.

OBSERVATION: *There is a deep historical tradition in this church, having been purposely placed in the center of old Canton by the city and being a “place to be seen” ... to thriving in the now-inner city area as it changes and hopefully is reborn anew.*

Being of service consistently arose as vitally important to this church. We might suggest additional discussion about how to strengthen existing and develop new ways to serve the congregation, neighbors, city, and the broader world. Lace this exploration with the expansive goal of ultimately identifying the skills needed by every level to foster the skills and then put those skills into action.

What accomplishments are the most important for this church to achieve over the next 10 years?

Why 10 years? Research indicates that, in general, the average span for a minister’s service to a church is 10 years. We realize you have enjoyed a long tenure over the past 20 years, but this is far less likely today. The first 2-4 years are the “honeymoon stage,” where congregation and minister get to know one another, learn the “jobs” each has, and effect well-reasoned changes together. The next 5-8 years are filled with change, growth, and development, when the careful selection, initial getting-to-know one another period bears fruit according to what the vision and mission indicate. Years 9-10 are evaluative years, then, when congregation and minister carefully consider “what’s next?” – and if extending forward together is called for, the process begins anew. It is unrealistic to expect instant change, growth, or development – it is a process that benefits from reflection and renewed exploration of “what’s next?”

These results are presented in table format, consolidated into broader categories, without rankings. Notice they are written in the present tense, as this is the vision, the desire to be achieved.

<p>WE FOSTER INCLUSIVITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We break away from “comfortability.” • We welcome everyone. We are responsive, welcoming, and inviting to all, reminding others of God’s love. • We lead, not just catch up, to the needs of LGBTQi and other marginalized populations. We are inclusive in word and action, and include marginalized voices (female, minority, LGBTQi, etc.) • We cultivate and engage all potential members – including singles, older individuals, families, children, youth, 20-somethings, recent graduates, and new Canton residents – in church life, and in growing in faith and mission. • We communicate, reach out, and follow up regularly to/with those who are not yet members (strangers, visitors, etc.). • We empower members and friends to be active in the life of Christ Canton (ushers, lay leaders, elders, deacons, volunteers, etc.) • We make church, liturgy, and services inclusive and understandable to all while carefully balancing tradition with modern and emerging perspectives. • We actively foster better relationships, understanding, and collaboration with other faiths and faith traditions. • We actively collaborate with the Presbytery and the churches within it. 	<p><i>We run this first simply because it was a major vote-getter for the skills (see last question). Because it snared the lion’s share of votes outside of the “usual” list of leadership skills, we decided to drop it in first. The ones that follow are of no less importance.</i></p>
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<p>WE ARE KNOWN AS A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE THAT SUPPORTS MISSION AND EMBRACES OUR LOCATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We maintain and develop new activities such as feeding McKinley band, Wakonda, TIQVAH, and many others. • We collaborate with other churches, community organizations, Malone U, among others. • We open our building to community needs (daily prayer/showers/bathrooms/AA) and/or find ways to provide or support those at our location. • We are an active resource/support for those who hurt spiritually and emotionally. • We explore innovative ways to serve our community (gift card outreach, for example) 	<p><i>Note: This supports all the information we gleaned from this church during these two circles. Mission and outreach are embedded in this church’s DNA. Congratulations!</i></p>
<p>WE EMBRACE CHANGE AND GROWTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We offer and actively study to become better disciples who embrace change. • We actively develop youth who step out and lead as young Christian voices. • We offer multiple worship styles and activities—small groups, traditional, contemporary, musical, creative—in various ways. • We explore mixed-media approaches to expand outreach and communication. • We stay abreast of trends and explore how other churches attract youth and members, using that to spark ways to create our own effective techniques. • We sponsor/give community concerts at our church as well as at other venues. • We provide access to worship in God’s creation/nature via outdoor activities such as Wakonda, hiking, etc. • We support and develop “green” initiatives. • We are active in social justice causes. 	<p><i>Note: This category both dovetails with the prior one and yet stands alone, as it’s focused on a culture of being open to possibilities.</i></p>
<p>WE COMMUNICATE WELL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a well-organized communication model for internal and external audiences; we use multiple delivery modes, reaching out to community and members through technology, word of mouth, etc. • We are savvy about public relations. • We regularly develop and use educational moments to help newcomers and visitors better understand what it means to be Presbyterian. 	<p><i>Note: we think this category exhibits the expressed need of the congregation to become better communicators, using new / old avenues in purposeful ways that dovetail with inclusivity and knowledge in open and transparent ways. This also speaks to being willing to see the work of the church in light of public relations and awareness (using secular methods in spiritual ways and not hiding our light under a basket).</i></p>

OBSERVATION: *It appears to us that most of your list of accomplishments will simply need the vision, planning, and establishment of methods and possibilities to achieve them. Good leadership will help foster that and will reach into the congregation to flesh out individuals and teams that can discern a direction, a timetable, and a methodology. It’s a great vision.*

What skillsets and strengths are most important for a new minister or ministers to have that will help to create the vision you seek?

***What’s Most Important?** What do you value most in a minister? Preaching skills? Pastoral Care? Moderation/Administration of the Church? Mission Development and Community Outreach? Something else? The Renaissance Person is exceptionally rare, if he/she exists at all, and, in truth, most of us have only one or two solid go-to skillsets to bring full-heartedly to our roles. A minister is no different. She or he has training on many aspects of ministering, but will excel only in one or two things, not all. However, the hallmark of a successful, strong leader is that he or she knows what they do well and what they don’t, and has developed leadership skills to cultivate collaborative leadership in less well-used areas.*

*It’s vitally important for a congregation to give serious, prayerful consideration to what a newly called minister **must have** as strengths. It means being very clear on what accomplishments you **realistically** envision over a 10-year period AND ranking the skillsets you wish a new minister to have. You must be able and willing to look outside the box and rework expectations based upon a potential applicant pool and/or a potential called candidate’s strengths, looking inside the membership for additional support. There is no Superman or Wonder Woman, no “red cape.” But you can find excellent candidate(s) if you are willing to see possibilities for collaborative roles for members along with minister(s).*

*We recommend ranking the most important, narrowing it to no more than five elements. The following list begins that process. Rank those in order, with the expectation that you are looking for a combination of those five (**but realistically the top two, maybe three**). Be watchful for new skills a candidate presents beyond your top two or three. This will make your search realistic. It will help candidates know if they fit. It will help you define what you seek. And it will streamline the process so it wastes no one’s time.*

These results are presented in table format with rank (there are nine broad areas) and vote results for of those nine areas. We highlighted the top 4 – those with scores in the double-digits – as the place for serious consideration. Your list of desired skills will pull from these areas.

RANK	STRENGTH / SKILL SET	VOTE	NOTES
1	LEADERSHIP STYLE, APPROACH, METHOD, SKILLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servant leader (empowers, supports) • Team player/seekes multiple perspectives • Motivator • Politically savvy • Has skills you have found in associate pastors.* • Open to change/Change agent; Tackles current needs/Quick Learner • Out-of-box thinking • Fair; just. Handles difficult conversations well and manages personnel well • Sensitive to tradition/mindful of future • Collaborator; flexible and adaptable • Strong administrative skills/organized • Decisions grounded in faith • Clearly communicates expectations of congregation and seeks congregation’s expectations of pastor. 	76	<i>We capture the most obvious skills under leadership – precisely where they belong. Note that “politically” savvy refers not to partisan politics, but encompasses self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Key skills for that are sincerity and authenticity (see rank #4), understanding the church and how it functions, ability to build a strong network (team, needs), and to communicate well, collaborate, and share a vision. It also includes the ability to know when to speak and when not to ... and how to help others catch a vision.</i> <p><i>*We don’t know what these skills are, so it’s incumbent upon the transition team to identify what this bullet point encompasses and add them if not already captured.</i></p>

2	<p>RELATIONAL: RELATES TO ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming to LGBTQi community (and to anyone who is marginalized) • Balances tradition in response to world, social change • Provides/empowers pastoral care for all members, including homebound. Attentive to all church life • Ability to connect with all / relates to all ages, byt especially youth and families. 	50	<p><i>We note that most (33) of the votes in this category were placed on items participants supported that deal with acceptance – especially but not limited to LGBTQi – and we get the sense that this is a very important issue for much of this congregation. Secondary was youth. We further note that the first group of conversation circles actually included youth in the discussion.</i></p>
3	<p>ENTHUSIASM FOR SERVICE/MISSION MINDED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowers and equips laity to serve • Passion for outreach/growth such as TIQVAH, McKinley School, Wakanda, etc • Collaborates (churches, Malone U., schools, etc.) 	28	<p><i>The third of the big 3, this is not surprising given the focus of the church on mission and doing the work of Christ in the world. Note a call to empower and equip laity. That is an <u>inclusive</u> vision.</i></p>
4	<p>AUTHENTIC: SPIRITUAL, ACTION, SELF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual integrity • Inspires by actions • Self aware, self analyzes, connected to inner sense of self Acknowledges strengths & weaknesses 	27	<p><i>Personally, we might be inclined to pop this to the top, because authenticity is what drives a great leader. But it is already in the top 4. Kudos to this congregation – you realize the value of having an authentic leader.</i></p>
5	<p>SUPPORTS/ENCOURAGES MUSIC PROGRAM</p>	6	<p><i>This is in keeping with your history and what’s valuable now for Christ Presby. The votes may not directly reflect the music program, but the conversation certainly proved its value here.</i></p>
6	<p>STORYTELLER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality preaching and attention to new, fresh sermons that inspire • A good storyteller • Has a focus for total worship experience 	5	<p><i>This is likely more of a reflection that a segment of the congregation hungers for fresh voices. Of course, that will automatically happen in July, one way or another. One caveat: please be careful to not equate age with “current,” as a current voice is more a result of an inquisitive, curious mind that’s always learning rather than a result of age. Definitely omit ANY reference to youth or age so your search cannot be construed as discriminatory.</i></p>
7	<p>SEMINARY TRAINED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biblical scholar • Ability to answer biblical questions • Intellectual approach to faith 	4	<p><i>Perhaps this is an adjunct to skills. We hope you consider making this an element of selection, but not a requirement. Perhaps also discern if and how this reflects the needs of the past vs. the needs of the future.</i></p>
8	<p>COMMUNICATOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication skills • Approachable 	3	<p><u>Caveat:</u> Remember both extroverts and introverts can be good communicators. And both can be bad communicators as well.</p>
9	<p>ACTIVELY ENCOURAGES A CULTURE OF ACCESSIBILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses technology/tech-savvy • Works to create accessible worship that extends far beyond the sanctuary – eg: Facebook, livestream, online presence, blogs, special events, etc. 	1	<p><i>We suspect this is low simply because you recognize a minister needs to be accepting and encouraging, and perhaps visionary, but that the church “has people” for this skill. The ability to envision, encourage, and help build a culture of accessibility is more likely what you will actually seek.</i></p>

OBSERVATION: *It appears to us that the skillsets you identified as most important for a new minister to possess can be winnowed down easily to the top four:*

- 1. Leadership Style, Approach, Method, and Skills*
- 2. Relational: Relates to All Kinds of People*
- 3. Enthusiasm for Service / Mission Minded*
- 4. Authentic: Spiritually, In Action, and in Self*

Notice also that the scores for the top two are significant. The scores for the next two are very close. The final five are significantly lower.

And, as we mentioned, the 4th skill, Authentic, is easily assimilated into the kind of leader you seek. In truth, we feel strongly the Authentic: Spiritually, in Action, and in Self is what is required for effective leadership. We kept it in the lineup as shown simply because we also believe it is what is also required to be able to create and maintain effective and meaningful relationships.

We believe the four top rankings work hand in hand to create the kind of leadership this congregation seeks and will welcome in a new minister, co-ministers, or the similar leadership model you currently have. The bottom five will likely be discerned in the search process and will be supportive features for a candidate to possess.

Next Steps:

The search team is now beginning the due diligence process and will be using the results of the conversation circles to assist in answering the narrative questions of the MDP (Ministry Discernment Profile) that will be used to find applicants for head pastor(s). We have already begun to update the mission statement of the church based on the feedback we received from the attending congregation. The support for Pastors Ben & Michael didn't go unnoticed! If anyone has any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact us.