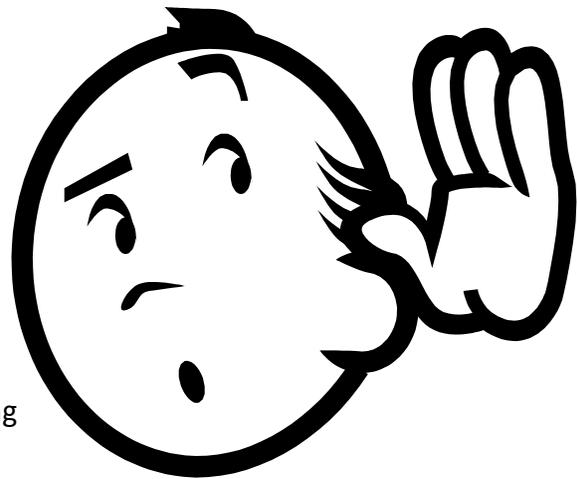


Listening Posts

Report

During September and early October 2011, Calvary United Methodist Church conducted a series of "Listening Posts." These sharing sessions were designed as a way for our new Pastor, Doug Paysour, to learn more about the congregation, allow the church to begin dreaming about where the Calvary ministry is going, and discuss the professional staffing needs of the church.



Favorite things. Each session began with some warm up during which congregants shared how they came to be a part of the Calvary community of faith and named their favorite hymn or praise song. They also shared their favorite thing about Calvary United Methodist Church. Answers that came up again and again included the caring, warmth and accepting nature of the congregation, having children and youth in the church, and the wide variety of mission efforts, which include the Weekday School, the Food Pantry and the Older Adult Visitation.

Other favorite well-discussed "favorite things" of Calvary include: the traditional order of worship, the attitude of the worshipers, the sharing of Communion, and the different preachers who have blessed the congregation over the years. Other oft-mentioned items include the education programs, Sunday School classes and short and long term Bible studies. The fellowship events and the dinners were named as well (we United Methodists do like to get together and eat).

Finally, Calvary members expressed an appreciation for the professional staff and the stability of the nursery workers (especially valued by young parents), which include both paid staff and dedicated volunteers.

Dreams of the People. Pastor Doug led all the groups through a dreaming exercise in which participants were asked to "go to sleep for five to ten years," then awaken to return to Calvary and imagine what the church might be if the church had been the most faithful church it could be.

Of course the imaginings covered a wide variety of things and Pastor Doug next directed the groups to single in on the "One Thing," which would be most essential to being a faithful congregation. Overarching themes were "serving Christ" and "letting the community see Jesus in our actions."

One item that would enable us to best fulfill our mission would be the oft-talked about Family Life Center, which was mentioned in every session. Such a Center could be built on the present campus (if county sewer is extended) or it might be centered in an existing building somewhere in the Stuarts Draft community. The center could possibly house meeting spaces, an indoor gym area, and spaces for visiting mission teams to stay and shower. It might house an Afternoon children's program, a Soup Kitchen, or the Food Pantry, as that mission has grown so fast it is currently becoming constrained by space. Interestingly, several dreamed of a time when hunger is overcome and the need for the Food Pantry would be gone! It should be noted that with a growing campus facility the need for a professional maintenance plan would be needed which might include a Grounds Committee and/or a Maintenance Committee.

Another line of thought for "The One Thing" is an ever-increasing membership – meeting our mission call to make disciples for Christ. Ideas for accomplishing this call would be every member in ministry and reaching out to our inactive members. Our average attendance is about 360-370 weekly, while the church's membership is about 900. Reaching more young people and young families with better, more exciting programs was mentioned in all sessions. This area of discussion was very passionate including ideas such as a full time Pastor for the young and even a Contemporary worship service.

Staffing Needs. Bill Betlej moderated the next area of discussion, which revolved around the staffing needs of the church. Calvary has been blessed and continues to be blessed with powerful, creative professional staff. These positions assist and guide the Laity in fulfilling the dreams and ministries of the church. With one position currently open, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, charged with the hiring duties of the church, wanted to get a sense of how the congregants have been served by staff in the past, and in what areas they feel staff should concentrate in the future. Again the listing here does not weight the responses but only groups them in themes to increase understanding.

- ✚ One such theme recalled the value of our Spiritual Formation position noting the importance of promoting Bible studies, the communication and marketing efforts, and organizational support. If such a position is continued the person needs to have a strong theological education coupled with communication and organization skills.
- ✚ Engaging the Laity should remain a high priority. Volunteer management, perhaps even a Volunteer Coordinator, is a way to ensure that laity does not miss opportunities to serve; and to organize those volunteers. Also included is the need to improve training, encouragement and nurture of volunteers through job descriptions and seminars.
- ✚ Critical to our congregation's growth, another area of staff need is in Young People's Ministries, which may take form in a Youth Pastor or Program Minister. The needs of children's and youth ministries, especially in the areas of relationship building and scriptural education, warrant the consideration of such a position. The needs of our Young Adults was also noted – those of College age (18-25), young couples, and singles. Of course, family support groups, older adult ministries, and intergenerational ministries all are in the mix as well.

Additional items of interest include the growing administrative needs of the congregation, which may necessitate additional part-time administrative staff; possibly adding staff for the Food Pantry; and potentially moving toward a full-time custodian.

All told, about 140 different people participated in at least one "Listening Post," with energy and ideas flowing abundantly. Thanks to all who participated. It was an illuminating experience.

- Mr. Bill Betlej
- Pastor Doug Paysour