June 4 - Congregational Small Group Conversations

EMOTIONS/FEELINGS BROUGHT TO THE FORUM:
A few congregants felt distressed at the lack of member involvement; a few felt disheartened by lack of response from the ET and Board. Other emotions were anger & resentment, disrespected, feeling left-out (like a stranger). Concern about the future of our church. Although comfortable with conflict, sense too much and not moving on. A sense of intolerance of dissent.

THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS SHARED WITH LARGE GROUP:

Communication -
• Lack of response to communications from congregation; not sought, not responded to, not reflected in decisions - not consistent with beloved community.
• Too much focus on conflict.
• Lack of ways to connect with each other.
• Lack of attention to silos and intercommunication
• Keyes Report - Communication - need ways congregation can share with board and the rest of the general congregation.
• Some of these issues just keep dragging on. Congregants don’t feel informed of decisions or what’s happening, so things drag on. In that void of not enough info, people make their own assumptions.
• Difference between official and informal sources of info. Sometimes official sources are lacking.

Transparency/Accountability -
• Need more information on why decisions are being made - financial, screens, fee structure for RE and choir.
• Screens a unilateral decision to install, whether a person likes them or not. Look to mitigate the screens.
• Involve more lay leaders in committees to supplement work of staff and board.
• Suggest meeting with congregation about the Annual Report addressing the life of the church for the year.
• Need a broader conversation about the budget with more detail and real repercussions of not meeting our budget (staffing changes). Gives congregants an opportunity to step up and increase contribution when they understand and see whole picture.
• Actions taken by ET and Board need more congregational input beforehand.
• ET needs to share their vision of changes to get input from congregation. Invite input before decision made - knowing ET has final decision.

Democratic process/PBG -
• Not enough congregational input; is Policy Based Governance really working (top down governance).
• Review Policies for changes needed.
• Review policies to give Board more strength.
• Need to re-instate annual meeting with budget detail, questions and ability to give input. Draw congregants with food!
Staffing -
• Need ways for congregational input to these subjects. Board should be the lead on determining levels of staffing.
• Uncertainty of Kate Lore’s departure; want to hire a minister to replace; we’ve lost a key woman in leadership.
• Share all employees salaries. Use as a tool to increase pledging by seeing need.
• Music Director model was inspired! Use same for Social Justice and Adult Program Leader.
• Long range planning committee needed to look at issues like parking, staffing, our changing downtown neighborhood.

Bringing us together/Congregational Life Initiative -
• Priority to Welcome new members and visitors
• Humanists are excluded often in our services - Mary Gear model was good.
• Too much of service is given to the current occupant of the White House, want more spirituality. Lay led service - and a worship committee to plan them - might help.
• On-going acknowledgement and appreciation of volunteers for their work and time. Make part of the annual report in August.
• How do we give the youth more responsibilities in the church and the Sunday services.
• What's happening with the CLI? Want more updates.
• More neighborhood dinners, interactions.
• Receptions for visitors and new members.
• Assign existing members to new members - mentoring.
• Charter committees to supplement board capabilities.

The bigger community -
• Need greater collaboration and community outreach.
• Good book for congregation on world issues is “Solving 9-11” webpage bollyn.net

Things participants like about our church now:
• Value of collective wisdom of the congregation. All are trying to move forward in love.
• Congregants appreciate positive responses to their requests and being thanked and acknowledged by the Board and ET.
• Generous spirit of community and our influence on the bigger community
• We can talk with each other even with difference of opinions.