What We Heard: The Martin UMC Listening Tour

Oct 4, 2026

A Word Before We Begin

Dear Martin family,

Between July 30 and mid-September, about 160 of you opened your living rooms, your chapel, and your hearts to me, and around coffee tables and kitchen islands and folding chairs in Soul Food you told me the stories of this church, the ones that make you laugh and the ones that still make your voice catch, and I have been carrying them with me ever since. I asked three simple questions: When have you seen Martin at its best? What do you hope I won't change? If God handed you a magic wand, what would you pray for? What came back was not thirteen separate conversations but one conversation, held thirteen times, in thirteen different rooms.

This resource is my attempt to hand that conversation back to you. Every story and every quotation here is real, spoken by someone who loves this church with names kept confidential. You may recognize your own words. You will certainly recognize the heart behind them, sitting side by side with words from people you may not have met yet, saying remarkably similar things. You will also find some honest naming of the places where we are stuck, because love that only tells the good parts of the story isn't really love, and because I believe the Holy Spirit is already at work in exactly those places.

Please read it slowly. Read it with your Sunday school class or your small group or your spouse over breakfast. Linger with the reflection questions at the end. And then pray with me about what God might be asking of us next, especially as we discern together the future of Lord's Acre and the next generation of disciples at Martin.

With gratitude and great hope,

Pastor Katie

The Listening Tour at a Glance

Thirteen gatherings, about 160 voices, three questions, and one remarkably consistent answer. Most sessions met in members' homes, generously hosted across Bedford, Colleyville, Hurst, and the surrounding area. One gathered Mosaic worshipers, one gathered young parents, and one was held with our Tongan-speaking congregation. Our SPR chair joined nearly every session.

Date	Where we gathered	Who was in the room
July 30	A member's home in Colleyville	15 members, many of them longtime traditional worshipers
Aug. 2	Mosaic Chapel	About 20 Mosaic worshipers, including teens

Date	Where we gathered	Who was in the room
Aug. 4	A member's home in Hurst	12, including children's ministry leaders
Aug. 6	A member's home in Colleyville	14, including our Finance chair
Aug. 16	A member's home in Bedford	18
Aug. 20	A member's home	17
Aug. 23	A member's home	10
Aug. 27	A member's home	10
Sept. 1	A member's home	10, including Beacon House leaders
Sept. 8	A member's home in Colleyville	About 20, including newer families and children
Sept. 10	A member's home in Bedford	8
Sept. 13	Soul Food at church	19 young parents and adults, Tongan and non-Tongan
Summer 2026	Tongan community gathering	Members of our Tongan-speaking congregation

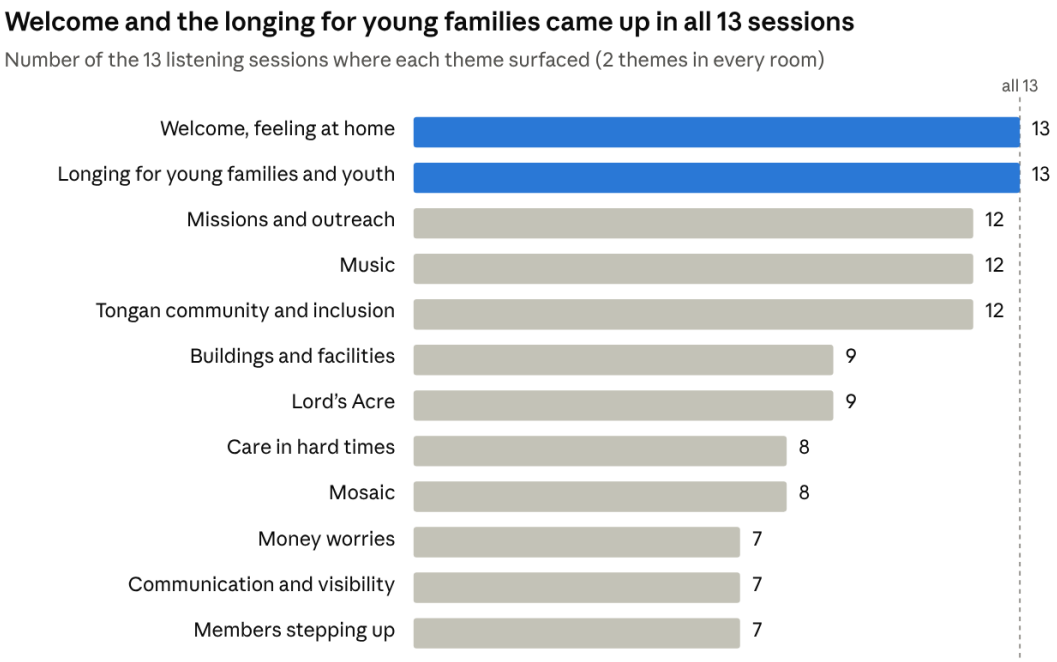
The questions we asked:

1. Tell me a story about when you have seen Martin at its very best.
2. What do you hope I won't change?
3. If you had a magic wand, and by the power of the Holy Spirit one thing could happen at Martin in the next three to five years, what would it be?

The young parents' session on Sept. 13 added questions about the gifts and gaps for adults and for children at Martin.

What We Heard: The Threads That Run Through Every Room

In thirteen different rooms, with people who in many cases had never sat together before, the same seven stories kept rising to the surface. Here they are, in your own words.



Listening session notes, July 30 to Sept. 13, 2026 · themes counted from a close reading of all 13 sessions

1. "We're home."

No single word appeared more often than *home*. One woman remembers her husband turning to her after their first Sunday at Martin and saying, "We're home." In a different living room, on a different night, another woman shared that her husband had said the very same words to her. A mother remembered walking into Wooton Hall when her daughter was small; the little girl kicked off her shoes, and when her mother started to scold her, she said, "Mom, I'm home." A widow who walked in 27 years ago, six weeks after her husband died, said, "It felt like God's arms wrapped around me." One man once visited another church three times before anyone spoke to him; at Martin, several people welcomed him on his very first Sunday. A mother who is still visiting with her family called Martin "a balm on my soul."

Welcome surfaced in all thirteen sessions. It is not a program at Martin. It is who we are.

2. "The church took care of us."

Again and again, Martin at its best was Martin at someone's worst moment. A couple whose son was seriously ill found their freezer filled with meals by a Sunday school class they didn't even belong to. A longtime couple remembered how this church surrounded their family when their adult son died. A woman whose husband died suddenly 25 years ago told how members helped send one of her children to college, donated cemetery plots, and brought meal after meal: "I can never forget the kindness and the generosity." A man shared that the church saw him through his wife's long battle with Alzheimer's. A widow in our Tongan congregation said the church keeps her spiritually grounded. And one gentleman summed it all up in four words: "Martin does love well."

3. "That's the Martin way."

Our mission story is long and deep: Food for Learning, the Community Pantry, Beacon House, Thanksgiving baskets, Christmas Stars, Justice for Our Neighbors, Project Transformation. But listen to *how* people told those stories. When Bedford closed its library for a summer, Martin opened one. When Katrina evacuees arrived, Soul Food fed up to 250 people a week. During COVID, a casserole ministry was born.

At Beacon House, volunteers set aside a donated wedding dress for a young bride they hoped would come back, and when she did, everyone shared in her joy as she tried it on. Another day, a woman stopped by and shared that her grandparents had once lived in that house, and that her own children had pressed their handprints into the concrete walkway years ago. She wondered if she might keep that piece of concrete. The volunteer could have said, "Sorry, it's no longer ours to give." Instead she said, "I'll ask." The new owner said yes. As one member put it, "That's the Martin way." Another called these our "quiet ministries" and wondered whether we need to be a little louder about them.

4. "Martin always accomplishes what it sets out to do."

A longtime member said it about the night we burned the mortgage. Another said it about the day Martin became debt-free: "Everyone rose to the occasion, and it happened." Members remembered "Pennies for Pipes," the campaign that bought our organ, and Saturday workdays when people learned to hang Sheetrock together. One man remembered water pouring in from every direction at Mosaic's first band practice, and everyone grabbing towels. A woman said everyone helped launch Mosaic "even if it wasn't their jam." Serving her fifth congregation, Pastor Katie named this as the thing that surprised her most: "There is a heart of willingness here. Y'all get it."

5. "When we opened our doors and our hearts."

One member called welcoming the Tongan community "the most amazing Christ-like thing we've done." From the other side of that same story, a Tongan member remembered that Martin opened its arms "in spite of other UMC churches not willing to embrace us," and another promised herself that this would be her church "to the very last breath of her life." Members named Tongan hymns, prayers, and the Tongan choir at 11:00 as treasures. A member of 34 years said it plainly: "I love our diversity. Tongans, gays, politics, all of it." Another said the openness of Martin is what kept her in church at all. For one young mother, Martin is "an oasis" that is "a little hard to find right now."

6. "Don't let the music decline one notch."

Our music staff and organist were named with deep gratitude in session after session, along with handbells, the junior bell choir, the Christmas cantata, the Mosaic band ("the secret sauce"), the Tongan choir, and the Tongan youth brass band. Music is one of the main ways people first fell in love with Martin, and it is one of the main ways young families stay.

7. The longing in every room: the next generation

This is the thread that tied every single session together. In all thirteen rooms, from members who have been here since 1972 to teenagers in the Mosaic chapel to the Tongan congregation, the magic-wand prayer was some version of the same thing: young families, children, youth, young adults. One mother said, "Without young families, you're a dead church." A longtime member admitted, "It scares me." One

member wants to see 50 kids at children's time. Tongan members asked how to reach parents in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. And the young parents themselves told us what keeps them here. One mom was blunt: "My kids are 100% the reason. If they're ever not happy, we'd be gone."

Many of you also remembered when it was different: when 12 to 15 vans left for a youth mission trip, when 19 young people filled the youth wind ensemble, when the youth group of the 1970s was full of energy. The longing is not for something Martin has never been. It is for something Martin remembers being.

The connection underneath them all

Listen closely to how people say they found Martin, and almost none of them mention a sign, a website, or an ad. One woman stayed away from Sunday school for years until a choir friend kept gently inviting her. Another member invited a friend to her class during COVID. A mother and daughter were invited from an Aqua Zumba class at the senior center. Friends brought friends, and those friends became family. A newcomer was told about events by a member who simply walked up and invited her. A returning member was plugged into the Community Pantry by an old friend who remembered her. Martin has always grown one invitation, one casserole, and one open door at a time. That is our greatest strength, and as you'll see in the next section, it is also the key to our greatest challenge.

Beneath the Surface: The Deeper Work God Is Inviting

Many of our magic-wand wishes were practical: a roof that doesn't leak, a better website, someone to schedule the ushers. Those matter, and some of them we can simply fix. But almost every one of them is also pointing at something deeper.

Leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz draws a helpful distinction. A **technical problem** has a known solution; you call the right expert, spend the right money, and it's solved. An **adaptive challenge** is different. It asks us to change our habits, our assumptions, or our sense of who we are, and no expert can do that for us. Heifetz also observes that people don't really resist change; they resist loss. Every adaptive challenge asks us to let go of something good for the sake of something better.

Here is what we said, and the deeper question each one carries.

What we asked for	The deeper question underneath
A playground, children's church, a gym, morning VBS, a children's or family minister	Are we willing to rearrange our life together around people who aren't here yet?
A roof that doesn't leak, working HVAC, a full-time custodian, Building B gone, the organ repaired	What is the condition of our buildings saying about our hope and preparation for the future?
Finances in the bulletin, paying all our obligations, less dependence on Lord's Acre	Is our giving a transaction that funds a budget, or a discipline that forms our deeper trust in God as disciples?

What we asked for	The deeper question underneath
A better website, a better sign, more social media, promotion for Mosaic and youth	We are a church people find through relationships. How do we open a front door for people who don't know anyone yet?
A better time for Mosaic, a "join the church" moment there, Tongan and non-Tongan youth together	We celebrate our diversity. Are we also truly one body?
Someone to schedule ushers, someone who knows where everything belongs, a Lord's Acre that doesn't exhaust its leaders	Our "heart of willingness" runs on a few faithful heroes. How do we equip many instead?

Making room for those not yet here

Every session prayed for young families, and the young parents told us exactly what that will take: VBS in the morning when working parents can get kids there, a women's retreat that lasts a few hours instead of a whole weekend, grace when a family can't come every week, information they can find without already knowing someone. One young mother put it simply: "Just getting to church is a mission." These are not big-budget items. They are changes in our rhythms and our expectations.

One exchange at the Sept. 8 session captures the tension beautifully. One member shared that children running in and out of the sanctuary make it hard to focus on worship. A few minutes later, another said, "I love hearing a kid cry in church," and that he makes a point of telling young parents so. Both are faithful people who love Martin. The adaptive question is which discomfort we are willing to choose.

Pastor Katie has named a 10-year window in which a deep investment in children and youth can make Martin vital for the next generation. The question is not whether we want young families. Every room said yes. The question is what we are willing to give up so that they can find a home here the way we did.

"A church you'd be proud to get married in"

One member's phrase captures a longing heard in nine sessions. Another estimates our deferred maintenance at about $300,000. Members named leaking roofs, aging HVAC, water stains, dirty rooms, a kitchen stove that needs replacing, and an organ with stops that stick. One man, who has the skills but no longer the physical ability to fix things himself, said it pains him to see.

The deeper story here is that Martin was once a church where members held Saturday workdays and fixed things themselves. That generation has given faithfully for decades, and the way we used to care for our buildings is no longer available to us. Underneath the repair list is a question about stewardship and about hope: our buildings speak to every guest before any of us says hello. One member prayed that Martin would be "as physically and fiscally healthy as it is spiritually healthy."

From transaction to generosity

In several rooms, members asked for more financial transparency, and one believes people would be more likely to tithe if they understood where things stand. Another wished we weren't "always short of

money." Another prayed that we could do every mission we're led to "without worrying about how to pay for them."

When asked what had surprised her, Pastor Katie gently named something: the ways we give to the church can sometimes feel transactional. We buy a pie, we bid on an item, we sponsor a repair. All of those are good and generous acts, but they can quietly replace the deeper practice of giving as an act of worship and trust. The adaptive work is moving from fundraising toward generosity as discipleship. That journey runs straight through Lord's Acre, which gets its own section below.

Opening a front door

A member named it at the very first session: the church "doesn't have a front door." She meant it literally, and it is true in every other way too. One young mom didn't know about Wednesday night activities until another parent told her. A beloved men's breakfast no longer appears in the bulletin. A longtime member called our good work "quiet ministries."

Our greatest strength is that people find Martin through relationships. The challenge is that a church which spreads by word of mouth can become invisible to anyone who isn't already in the conversation. A new website will help, but the adaptive shift is a change of posture: thinking every week about how a stranger would find us, understand us, and take a first step in.

One body, many cultures

We have an 8:30 service, an 11:00 service, Mosaic, and a Tongan-language service at 2:00. We have longtime members and new families, older parents and younger ones. Members love this diversity and asked us never to lose it. But the young parents noticed that Tongan and non-Tongan children tend to separate, even at a lock-in, and one Tongan mother warned that if "the littles" don't learn to mingle now, the pattern is hard to break later. Another parent named a gap between younger and older parents. Mosaic worshipers described leaving early to make it to 11:00, and one remembered a past contemporary service that faded in part because it felt separate from the rest of Martin.

Hospitality means people are welcomed in. Belonging means they help shape what "us" means. The adaptive question is how we become more fully one church without asking anyone to become less fully themselves.

The heart of willingness, and its limits

"People will step up," one member said, and they do. But when members describe a Sunday scramble for ushers and Communion servers, when another asks for one person who knows where everything belongs, and when the Lord's Acre leaders are exhausted, we are seeing the limits of a church that runs on a handful of faithful heroes. One member prayed for younger leadership coming up. The adaptive shift is from asking the same willing people to do more toward helping every member discover and use the gifts God has entrusted to them, and building the simple systems that let new people step in.

The Lord's Acre: Holding What We Love With Open Hands

Lord's Acre came up in nine of our thirteen sessions, more than any other single ministry. It is also the clearest place in our life together where deep love and real strain live side by side, often in the very same person.

What we love

One member called it "an army martialed. It's an outreach, it's a unity thing, and it generates resources for missions." Another said, "The energy of it is special." Others said, "Everybody loves being together," and "It's one of my favorite times of the year." In the Tongan gathering, members lifted up the dances, the roast pigs, and the many ways Lord's Acre opened doors for people to give back to the church.

Some of you have been there from the beginning. One member remembers her first Lord's Acre in the mid-1980s: "Everything was outside. It was very humble, friendly, loving. You just felt the love." Another was at the very first one. Another remembers that it was smaller then: "We had cooks, and people who made things." Still another loved the days when everything was made by hand and the food came from members' own kitchens.

What we are carrying

Alongside the love, many of you named a weight:

- **The leaders are tired.** One member doesn't want it to go away but wishes it weren't so exhausting for those who lead it. Another noted it has grown into a three-day weekend and "a lot of work."
- **The budget depends on it.** A member who knows our finances well wishes we weren't so dependent on Lord's Acre and said it causes "a lot of budget angst." Another observed it has become "a bigger and bigger part of the budget," which puts heavy pressure on those in charge.
- **The pressure to beat last year.** One member said it can become competitive in an unhealthy way, with leaders feeling they must surpass previous totals.
- **The live auction raises hard questions.** At the Aug. 6 session, one member's concern that publicly proclaiming our giving isn't biblical sparked a lively conversation. Others said the auction may encourage people to hold back their giving during the year, can tempt people to spend more than they can afford, and can leave some feeling "less than" if they can't bid. Several said they feel uncomfortable inviting guests to that part of the day. At the Aug. 20 session, one member said the live auction "scares off nonmembers," and another said it can be depressing for members, too.

And a longtime leader offered an important word of caution: "It's a lot of work, but a lot of thought must be given to any changes. We don't want to lose the enthusiasm that it generates."

What the story is telling us

The Lord's Acre tradition began in 1930 in the mountain churches of western North Carolina. Cash was scarce, so farm families dedicated a portion of their crops or livestock to God and gave the proceeds to their church. At its root, it was an act of dedication: giving from what we have, the work of our hands offered back to the One who gave it.

That is what our longest-tenured members remember: a humble day outside, homemade food and handmade gifts, a day one member remembers as a time "to invite outsiders for a fun event at the church." Over the years, as the church's needs grew faster than its regular giving, Lord's Acre quietly became something those humble early gatherings never imagined: a load-bearing wall in our operating budget. That is no one's fault. It is what happens when a beloved tradition is asked to carry more and

more weight. But it explains almost every concern you raised. When a gift becomes a necessity, leaders feel pressure, totals become a scorecard, and the auction becomes about the number.

So the adaptive question in front of us is not "Should we keep Lord's Acre?" Almost everyone wants to keep it. The question is: **What is Lord's Acre for?** If we can answer that together, the decisions about format, length, and the auction will become much clearer.

Possibilities to discern together

These are not decisions. They are ideas that rose from your own words, offered as starting points for prayerful conversation:

- **Let regular giving carry the operating budget over time,** so that Lord's Acre proceeds can be given away to mission or set aside for a named, visible purpose, freeing leaders from the pressure to beat last year's total.
- **Return to the roots:** homemade and handmade, the work of our hands as an offering, with Tongan dances and roast pig, cooks and craftspeople at the center.
- **Design the day for guests,** especially young families and neighbors, so it becomes one of our best front doors again.
- **Lighten the load** by shortening the event, sharing leadership across more teams, and inviting new people into roles each year.
- **Reconsider the live auction** with care, listening both to those who find joy in it and to those who find it a barrier, and exploring forms of giving that welcome everyone.
- **Gather a small discernment team** that includes Lord's Acre leaders, Finance, the Tongan community, longtime members, and young parents, so that any change is shaped by the whole body, just as several of you asked.

Signs of Life: New Things Already Springing Up

Some of what you prayed for is already beginning to grow.

- **A young adult class that's working.** Two members started a new Sunday school class for young adults. One mom said, "That made me grow some friendships." Another had never been in a class as an adult: "I didn't know what I was missing."
- **Rhythms that fit families.** JAM follows the 11:00 service, which one mom called "seamless," and the Wednesday adult Bible study now starts when the kids' activities do. Another mom said, "I always pick them up and they're smiling." Mosaic also presents an opportunity to give parents a chance to worship while children are taught in Sunday School.
- **Children who are known and safe.** Parents named our children's ministry leaders and music staff again and again. "I know that they're loved and they're taken care of."
- **Coming in January:** a Methodism 101 class led by Pastor Fai'ana, a likely return of F3 small-group dinners, and a reboot of Mosaic with promotion, a possible time adjustment, and a group for going deeper right after worship.
- **Clearer, more faithful finances.** Regular financial updates to the congregation are coming, and Martin now pays its apportionments throughout the year rather than at year's end.
- **A search with hope.** Pastor Katie has rebuilt youth ministries in two previous churches, and the search for our next youth leader is underway.