

# Summary of Cottage Meeting Conversations

*Data from 10 focus group conversations about transition and reconciliation at Binkley Church.*

This report summarizes focus group conversations held in 10 cottage and interest-group meetings with Binkley Church, with approximately 70 total participants. The Reference Team facilitated the conversations, oriented around six questions, in April and May 2018. Some important themes can be seen in their notes from these meetings, and they are presented below.

## Responses by question

## 1. What do you most love and appreciate about Binkley Church?



Participants were enthusiastic in listing the things they most love about Binkley. The above word-art image<sup>1</sup> shows the key words (and main subjects) participants used in answering this question.

## Key themes:

- **People:** many called Binkley “like a family,” and love the sense of community; they value connecting with others, deep friendships, and the opportunity for small-group work. “It’s a good place to raise children.”
- **Social justice:** many mentioned appreciating the social justice focus of Binkley and the willingness to take on difficult issues such as racial awareness, and outreach to others in the community.
- **Worship and faith:** in particular, music, a growing place for faith, Baptist roots, connecting with God
- **Welcoming atmosphere:** accepting and affirming of everyone, support for the vulnerable; it’s safe to be different here, to grow without judgment

<sup>1</sup> This word-art image was made on wordle.net, a software that removes common stop-words and displays most-frequently-used words as largest.

## **2. When you reflect back on the last year or two at Binkley, what would you most like others to know about your experience?**

While at least a dozen participants named positive things here, most observations focused on the challenges, confusion, and pain around the ministerial selection process. Answers to this question provided much more conversation than answers to any other.

### **Key themes (in order of frequency mentioned):**

- A sense of secrecy and some people being on the ‘outside’ - this theme showed up in nearly every group
- A sense of confusion: a lot of people were blindsided and didn’t know what happened
- Sadness, disappointment, pain - these feelings were mentioned the most frequently
- Chaos and no clear sense of control - sometimes it seemed like no one was in control
- A sense that this kind of conflict has happened at Binkley before: usually swept under the rug, not resolved
- Need for hearing women’s voices, and the voices of those speaking from “the margins” of power
- A sense of loss (and fear of loss) - especially losing members or a sense of safety and community

## **3. What would reconciliation look like at Binkley?**

Among the wide diversity of responses, most were oriented around listening, repentance and forgiveness, and rebuilding relationships.

### **Key themes (in order of frequency mentioned):**

- Listening to one another, especially those on another “side” of a conflict, and rebuilding relationships
  - Listening from the heart
- People reflecting and understanding how they may have hurt others; taking responsibility for that
- Building paths for the whole congregation to move towards forgiveness
- Supporting those who are hurt and meeting needs of one another
- Creating new congregational strategies/policies for conflict management and listening, to avoid such a crisis again; and educating the congregation on these new strategies
- For some, the church seems already to be on its way towards reconciliation

## **4. How can we as a congregation be more welcoming of multiple perspectives?**

### **Key themes:**

- Suggestions for welcoming multiple perspectives included:
  - learn to have civil conversations around different opinions; work to ensure that young people, young families feel fully incorporated into the church; look at the whole

## **5. What do you want Binkley to do for you? For the next five years, where do you think Binkley should focus its mission?**

### **Key themes (in order of frequency mentioned):**

- Continued and deeper focus on outreach and the local community
- Keep worship fresh by continuing to change and introduce new things
- Rebuild the sense of community in the church
- Develop a shared vision and improve decision-making processes