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TO: The Congregational Board of Raymore Christian Church
FR: Regional Minister and President Bill Rose-Heim
RE: Report from the World Café

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you this summary of the responses gleaned from the five questions that you created for the World Café exercise that you organized and hosted on August 22nd, 2021. The information contained herein should prove to be helpful to you as you complete your congregational profile which is used to introduce the Raymore Christian Church to those qualified Disciples clergy who are open to receiving a call at this time.

Should you need help with your profile, you are invited to look at the sample posted at <https://www.kcdisciples.org/searchteam.html>. (A blank profile is also on that site and all material linked on that page is available to you at no cost to download.

When you complete the profile, your next step is to contact Rev. Dr. Paxton Jones, Interim Sabbatical Regional Minister from September 1 – November 30, 2021. (pjones@kcdisciples.org) He will be glad to post your profile and invite clergy in Search and Call to review it. Continue in prayer. God is already at work in this process to help you find your next minister. BR-H

Summary

Most of those who participated in the service of worship also stayed for the World Café which indicates a level of commitment that is encouraging. The exercise took about two hours following a boxed lunch.

The questions, generated by leaders in the church focused on providing information needed to complete the congregational profile used in the search process to find a new minister. I was unaware of the switch from questions I had prepared which included opportunities for story

telling/story listening and that may have influenced the outcome of the exercise. Scribes appear to have done a good job of helping people to express their responses openly.

Much of what participants expressed in this exercise would be familiar to Disciples who have been invested in suburban church life for much of their lives. “If we could just get more people, we could sustain forms of ministry that have worked well for decades.” A few congregations may be able to do that, but most cannot in the current religious culture.

The feedback from this exercise may suggest that contiguous and historic connections between Foxwood Springs senior residential center and the church campus may have more influence on the congregation’s footprint in the community than is apparent. Anyone who has attended the vespers services at Foxwood will usually find a cordial welcome, spirited singing, and little conflict between lay leadership and the chaplain. For the most part, only those who want to be at those services are in attendance. Visitors expect the service to be focused on supporting senior spirituality and a realistic approach to living in a community keenly aware of the end of life while making the most of the present moment.

The religious culture in the U.S. and even in the KC metro area has changed dramatically with two generations having been raised on the Internet with access to information and technology once reserved for a small part of the population. A twelve-year-old with a cell phone having more computing power than was available for the lunar landing in 1969 is not uncommon. The young are growing up with more opportunities and more uncertainty or stability than any previous generations. If they pay attention to the news, something is always very wrong – even threatening - somewhere around the world. Their faith in existing institutions that claim to promote security, equity and well-being is weak at best. In a pluralistic world with so many faith based and non-faith based religious organizations and virtual realities to choose from we cannot assume that they will find and choose faith in Jesus Christ in the same ways that we did as their parents, grandparents and great grandparents.

What is the real “why?” of Raymore Christian Church? If we could ask that question after every response until we got to the core of the congregation’s existence, how much of the congregation’s reason for existence would be about the members in church and how much would it be about carrying out the Great Commission – making and equipping more disciples of Jesus? This is a question challenging every congregation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and one of the primary sources of most of the internal conflicts and much of the indifference. We cannot all agree on policies, procedures, and methods because we cannot agree on the “why?”. If we are not clear and in robust agreement with and deep investment in our mission, vision, and values as God has revealed them to the Church in the example and teaching of Jesus and the Scriptures, it will be difficult for the community to see beneath the good, public charitable work that the church is doing to the underlying cause for all the sacrifices and investments being made and the worship being offered.

When International Business Machines realized that the Industrial Age was turning into the Information Age, they reduced their focus on building adding machines and electric typewriters and ramped up investment in computers. With the advent of Wi-Fi and the smart phone and increased global competition, the company invested more into super computers, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing. Why were they able to adapt so effectively? They were clear that they were never in the adding machine business, they were passionate about providing businesses with data management solutions. That clarity of mission (their “why?”) allowed them to take risks, let go of what customers no longer needed from them, and invested heavily on providing a service customers affirmed as a critical need for which they would pay.

In an ideal setting, every congregation would be crystal clear about and in near total agreement and commitment to their primary reason for existence. It may not be possible for this congregation to come to that best case scenario quickly, so, perhaps part of what could be a qualification in your next pastor is a proven ability to help a congregation get to their best “why?” that resonates with God’s “why?” for the Church.

That pastor may also need to be someone who can help the Raymore Christian Church learn more about what the three youngest generations of actual (or might-be) disciples of Jesus need from their Church to explore and experiment with new forms of being the Church while at the same time honoring and supporting the faith and religious practice of current saints who have given so much to faithfully sustain a ministry that still matters.

Questions and summaries of responses

For the questions listed below, you will find a summary and synthesis of responses recorded at tables. I will also offer observations. At the end of these summarized answers, is a repeat of each question and all the responses. Duplicate answers are indicated by the number of times each answer was recorded. This is to assure that all responses have been heard by the leadership team.

What are the strengths of Raymore Christian Church?

Many of the responses recorded for this question centered around location, faithful Christians, well-kept building, staff, diversity, outreach, support for groups outside the church, being debt-free, welcoming, and friendly. Also mentioned in one form or another was an awareness of a need and a commitment to grow.

Observation: These responses are typical of many congregations in the suburban areas of our Region. Also typical was a lack of references to a clear mission, vision, or values. It was a bit of a surprise to note that some thought it important to add a list of weaknesses.

What is the greatest need for spiritual growth at RCC?

Worship adjustments, more small groups, more one – one time with the pastor, better relationships between pastor and congregants, opportunities for youth, study on prayer and application of the Bible to everyday life, more classes, teachers, and flexible schedules, church growth, prayer ministries and devotions, learning to work together, inspiration, and challenge individuals

Observation: Most congregations would like to have all of these. There seems to be a reliance on the church growth models of previous times and not much mention about evangelism among those who are not yet connected with a church or a faith life.

What specific ministries do we want/need?

Youth and children's ministries, Bible studies, bereavement ministries, music ministry, small groups, fellowship, outreach, ministry to shut-ins, an active ministerial alliance with community worship services and an app for church communication. These were the ministries that were mentioned most. Intergenerational ministries were mentioned along with collaborating with existing nonprofit outreach ministries in the area like Lord of Life.

Observation: With the exception of the communication app, these ministry wants and needs have been standard fare for most suburban congregations that are struggling now.

In the next 5 years what do you see RCC doing in regards to membership?

- **Membership**

- By far the most common answer was a variation on "get more members." Respondents would like to see more youth, more tolerance of differences, more diversity, less judgement about appearances or whether one participates in congregational activities. Cultivate new leadership in the church was also mentioned as was a need to discover what it is that people outside the church are looking for in a church. Concern was expressed about finances.
- *Observation: There is an awareness that Foxwood Springs is connected to the Raymore Christian Church on several levels. Just before the World Café began, there was a report that a member of the church and a Foxwood Springs resident was needing medical attention. The juxtaposition of an institution that receives but does not need to do much to seek new members who may well spend their last days there - next door to a church that has a desire to grow its membership – (particularly with more youth) introduces a dynamic that few other congregations experience. This could be worth some attention.*

- **Worship Services**

- There were quite a few comments concerning worship and an apparent area of conflict. Blended worship? Add a contemporary service with a band (and if so, do they worship in another part of the building?). Some raised the issue of preaching in a way to apply the Bible to everyday living. Others are not happy with worship innovations or an emphasis on young families.
- *Observation: We are at a place in our rapidly changing culture with a widening technological divide between the oldest and youngest adult members where the needs for religious practice (chief among them – worship) are very different. Once we all had to worship the same way because there were few other options if we wished to be faithful to those who brought us to church with them. Innovation occurred less rapidly and was not really expected on a regular basis or it was innovation with a well-defined segment of the church like new music for the choir or creating a prayer phone tree but all that changed with the advent of televised worship services staffed by paid professionals and supported by large – often suburban new churches. With fewer parents attending and those attending not always insisting that their youth and children come with them, younger Christians expect little from traditional or even contemporary worship. . . unless they help to plan and lead it.*
- **Music Program**
 - Some would like to see the choir return; others would like for there to be more contemporary music – perhaps accompanied by video. Hiring a music director was listed twice. Other suggestions included more energetic singing of the music, adding a signature ending song at the end of every worship service.
 - *Observation: Music is one of the few areas of full-body participation left in Protestant worship. We often stand when singing robustly and when the music resonates with the spirit in the room, the experience is often memorable - even inspiring.*
- **Other Ideas**
 - Improve communication within the congregation and use electronic media to do that (texts, phone app, social media, etc.) was listed several times. Outreach and engagement with the community in creative new ways was also high on the list. Some of those ideas included participating with a float in the annual Raymore Festival and providing bookmarks to school children. Small group dinners (Dine with Nine), pop-up events involving sports or food, giving gifts to the newly baptized and to Foxwood residents, and partnership with local nonprofits and the ministerial alliance were also mentioned.
 - *Observation: There seems to be a growing awareness of the need to be creative, engaged in the community and to make better use of communications technology. A question to consider is, “What does the community need from Raymore Christian Church that it can find no where else?”*

What specific help to you intend to give to the new minister?

- Most of the comments were a variation on openness, acceptance, and other forms of support for a pastor like helping them get oriented to the church and the community, praying for the pastor, and helping them to identify priorities. Participants also mentioned being involved, attending church regularly, keeping a positive attitude, and having an effective Pastoral Relations Committee.
- *Observation: If in fact the congregation cannot provide a full-time opportunity, support for the new pastor will be essential for a sustainable relationship, given competing demands for the pastor's energy and attention.*

Full Listing of responses to each question

What are the strengths of Raymore Christian Church?

- Welcoming x 2
- Caring
- Friendly x 2
- Faithful Christians x 3
- Foxwood support
- Ministerial experience
- Committed to growing and sustaining RCC x 2
- Ownership of building/debt-free/financially secure
- Strong outreach x 2 – local and global – Baby Grace (x 3), Micah, Haiti
- Bright Cherubs Preschool x 3
- Location x 3
- Support outside groups x 3 – Boy Scouts, Grief support
- Congregation committed to RCC
- Current staff x 2
- Diversity x 2
- Jesus Christ
- Well-kept building x 2
- Music x 2
- Talents among members
- Volunteering
- Traditions Service

- Motivation
- Membership (increase)
- Care Community
- Children Ministry
- Contemporary Ministry
- Better Modern Music (kids included in Music)
- Outreach (Better) not check ready
- Good inspiration
- Leadership
- Christian Women's Fellowship
- Education

(Some participants thought it important to offer a list of weaknesses)

- Music program
- Unwillingness to change
- Not perceived as a family church
- No men's group

What is the greatest need for spiritual growth at RCC?

- More one on one with the pastor – calling – hospital or home
- Elders do calling with homebound and when someone isn't in church check on them
- Programs for all ages of children – youth groups
- Sunday School for kids x 2
 - At flexible times/days
- Church growth
- A contemporary service
- Treat the sanctuary with respect
- Welcome visitors – perhaps calling on them
- Minister who preaches the Bible in today's terms
- Open mind
- Everyone welcome
- Change
- Leadership
- Positive attitude
- Bible study x 3
 - Follow weekly sermon ideas
 - Specific topic
 - On Zoom

- Classes set at various times
- Prayer groups – requests
- Prayer trees/email blasts
- Prayer Warriors
- Contact with minister is essential
- Delegate more responsibility to the Deacons and Elders
- Need permanent minister soon
 - Minister simpatico
 - Involved on personal basis
- To be inspired
- Devotions
 - Daily
 - Booklet
 - Recorded or Text messages
- New member class
- Self-discipline to have individual study/prayer
- Strong parent influence on children
- Learn how to work together
- Change means growth
- Have Open discussion
- More teachers for each age group
- Necessary changes in service format
- Topics of how to apply scripture to everyday life
- Spirituality
- Find outreach in the community
- Youth opportunities
 - Church camp
 - Mission trip
 - Breakthrough 10-14 age
- Groups based on members interest
 - Regardless of location
 - Coffee shop?
 - Facebook?
 - Coffee with the Pastor
- Nursery to enable parents' participation
- Challenge individuals to develop
 - By others and by minister
- Small groups – Zoom
- Daystar TV
- Study on Prayer

- Fellowship with like-minded
- Local outreach involvement
- Diverse worship times and places
- Holy hike
- Sunset service

What specific ministries do we want/need?

- To youth and children x 2
 - Pre-school
 - Elementary
 - High school
 - VBS
- Bible study (options – men, women, mixed) x 2
- Ministry to shut-ins (communion/visits)
- Outreach (Feeding the world)
- Mission program
- Preach the Gospel
- Music Ministry (Special music groups) x 2
 - Choir
 - Contemporary
- Bereavement Ministry x 2
 - Let people know when donations are made to the church in memory of loved ones
 - Grief support
 - Help
- Fellowship x 2
- Attendance records
- Preaching/challenging
- App for Bible verse/study and message from Church
- Partner with other organizations
 - Local churches
- Congregational care (spiritual and physical)
- Community interaction/involvement
- Contact members and visitors
- Active ministerial alliance
 - Community worship services
 - Community service projects
 - Craft projects
- Outreach:
 - Baby Grace

- Micah
- Manger tree
- Education about Disciples of Christ denomination
- Prayer group
- Reestablish membership committee
- Nursery
- Cass County Nonprofit coalition (Lord of Love) non denomination
 - Talk to Andrea
- Small groups
- Inter-generational groups
 - Social and education
- Show help and care for our minister

In the next 5 years what do you see RCC doing in regards to membership?

- **Membership**
 - Current and new will need to be proactive
 - Get new members involved in small groups so people stay and bring others
 - Need someone exciting
 - Music is slow
 - Membership – we shouldn't have to show up for everything
 - (We missed you . . . guilt)
 - Expand membership
 - Set up table at the Farmer's Market, etc.
 - Advertising – magnetic or stickers
 - Encourage others to help with Baby Grace, etc.
 - Nonmembers (could be asked)
 - Increase membership through intentional efforts
 - What are new people looking for?
 - Are there people who look like me?
 - Music?
 - Sermon
 - Who follows up on prospective members?
 - Pastor or congregation leaders?
 - Preaching with today's issues but stick to the Bible
 - Open, inviting, and non-political (literally)
 - Open minded, accepting of all people no matter what they look like
 - No judgement – attire, sexual orientation, race, etc. they are all welcome
 - Increase communication through pastor outreach

- We count people coming in from Foxwood
- Lots of calls on people
- Foxwood needs transportation
- Foxwood TV channel – could they air our service?
- Could a commissioned minister or volunteer leader take a laptop to show the service and (offer) communion?
- In the hole if things don't change (financial condition?)
- We don't want to see it change/close
- No change/declining membership
- Need younger generation to keep it going
- We don't have the money
- Youth involvement
- Growing
- Make inviting/interesting
- Need to be more diverse congregation
 - Age
 - Ethnicity, etc.
- Partner with a more diverse church
- Cultivate a new leadership in the church
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- **Worship Services**
 - Traditional service in worship center
 - Contemporary service in another area with a band x 2
 - More interaction
 - Opportunity to learn
 - Appeal to a younger audience
 - Foxwood takes people to multiple services/congregations
 - Other churches have blended services
 - Need contemporary music - either 2 services or blended x 3
 - Remove and/or do blended music during service
 - Require grace on both sides/faithfully tolerate (faithful toleration?)
 - Someone to preach the Bible do today/blend it with what is going on today
 - Youth Bible or story bring it together
 - For young people church isn't @ church; could it be:
 - Coffee
 - Dinner at a restaurant,
 - Holy hike
 - Don't criticize groups doing new things (or) minister
 - Take care of elderly – sick of captivity storyteller

- Need to keep up especially with those without family
 - Connecting with congregation
- May be less people traditional gone
- Applying Bible to everyday living
- **Music Program**
 - Would like to see choir come back
 - How we sing music needs to be energetic
 - Maybe two services again
 - Music minister/director
 - Work to add contemporary music x 2
 - Pre-record in the beginning
 - Hire a music director
 - No song leaders
 - Add signature song at the end of the service
 - Could do video during services of contemporary music
 - (Amazing Grace – classic but more upbeat)
 - Bring in volunteers – instruments/talents
- **Other Ideas**
 - Outreach needed to recruit others
 - What if they only help with Baby Grace or Holy Hike?
 - They want to do service projects
 - App for church with two coordinated messages a week
 - Develop electronic communication system to distribute Bible study info regularly
 - Text/email/app
 - Give gift with baptism – communion up, etc.
 - Food drive
 - Bookmark for the local school students without our name
 - School involvement
 - Easter Baskets for Foxwood residents
 - Increase social media
 - Streaming issue with church services/investment in equipment
 - Need volunteer team to do recording/computer for contemporary music
 - Supporting student musicians
 - Communication – lack of causes, issues
 - People turn against minister because they don't (?) communication
 - Communication among congregation soon
 - Pop-up event”
 - Basketball tournament
 - Corn hole between services
 - T-shirt giveaway

- Hats for Father's Day
 - Donuts
 - Ice Cream
- Partnering with Heart and Hand/Eagles Community Outreach
- Free hot soup Wednesday outreach
- Alliance of churches in the area – we need to be involved
- More youth involved
 - Kids invited/mom and dad to bring them
- Sunday school for all ages
- Small groups – Dine with nine
- People just writing checks
- More fellowship
- Bible study
- Raymore Festival float in the parade
 - Free water
- Love community services
- More evening/weekend activities
- No youth activities
 - Not wanting to come because they are not enjoying it
- Move (into) the community
 - Members may not step into churches but do a regular Bible study outside the church
- Pews probably won't be full
- Busy/watch church online
- Technology isn't going away
 - Need to adapt with it or be gone
- Develop CWF again
- Manger tree

What specific help to you intend to give to the new minister?

- Open communication that extends beyond our committees and small groups
- Supportive colleague
- Support Baby Grace Mission and other outreach programs
- Keep an open mind and be flexible
- Communicate potential new members
- Spiritual and emotional support including prayers
- Support growing our church as a priority
- Help identify church priorities
- Provide positive affirmation and accept transitional change with grace

- Financial support – including leadership
- Congregation all support for shut-ins – phone calls?
- Welcoming membership and potential new members and provide follow up support
- Welcome and accept new minister and family
- Attend church regularly
- Have realistic expectations and timelines
- Forward thinking – positive attitude
- Help adapt to the surroundings
- Providing a fresh work environment
- Elders offer spiritual guidance
- Supportive pastoral committee with checks and balances