



August 15, 2021

TO: Park Hill Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
FROM: Regional Minister Bill Rose-Heim
REGARDING: World Cafe Report for Park Hill Christian Church

Summary

On August 8, members of the Park Hill Christian Church remained after worship and gathered around eight tables to participate in this exercise. One major difference was that scribes moved from table to table and got to hear from and record responses from seven different groups. The energy was positive and participants worked quickly to answer seven questions that might help the Search Team to complete a congregational profile that accurately reflects their sense of mission, vision, and values.

Park Hill Christian Church has a well-developed reputation for generosity, compassion, and outreach. They give more than ten percent of their income to support wider church, community, and global missions and ministries. This is a congregation that roundly confirms its ongoing commitments to inclusion, welcome, and acceptance. Several of the members are engaged in a variety of community services. The church hosts many nonprofit groups – including three other churches (Evangelical Presbyterian, Oromo Ethiopian Evangelical and a Faith Church – a Chuukese Disciples of Christ congregation) and a preschool in its spacious and welcoming campus.

This is a congregation where members enjoy one another's company and care for each other. They are aware that they will need help to connect with the two youngest generations. There is preliminary talk of becoming a "grandparent church" where current members continue to enjoy what feeds them spiritually and provides opportunities for continuing outreach yet opens a space for younger adults to explore new ways to be the Church among their peers.

Park Hill Christian Church seeks a pastor that can be engaged with the current membership, the community and, perhaps, a new faith community led by some of the now younger adults who were raised and nurtured in the church.

Questions with summarize answers and observations follow. Later in this document readers will find all of the statements recorded during the event.

Question 1 What was your first encounter with Park Hill Christian Church?

Given that many who participated in the World Café have been members for a while, it was not surprising that there are good memories of a pastor (Rev. Larry Patterson) who made follow up home visits and members who invited neighbors, co-workers, and friends to come to their church. People found the members here to be warm and friendly. There were programs and activities for children and youth and the addition of a gym with a basketball court was appealing.

Observation: *It is good to think about what impressions a first-time visitor would have today. Much of that might depend upon the age of the visitor. Older adult visitors would likely feel welcome in Park Hill Christian Church's well-kept space. A question that nearly every Disciples congregation must ask is whether they seem as inviting to younger adults and families with young children.*

Question 2 When anyone asks you why you are a member of Park Hill Christian Church, what do you tell them?

The most common responses centered around being open, friendly, accepting, non-judgmental people. For many this church feels like family. Friendships are formed and nurtured. Community outreach and service is important. People have watched their children grow up in a supportive church.

Observation: *Members find Park Hill Christian Church to be a spiritual "home." Relationships are strong. There is a level of commitment to values and to each other that is palpable. How would older youth and younger adults fit in, or, would their idea of a church "home" be different today?*

Question 3 How would a young adult moving into this area learn about Park Hill Christian Church?

The number one answer was social media. Word of mouth, preschool, driving by and seeing the sign, sports, Scouts, and invitations from family and friends were mentioned often.

Observation: *Of the items listed above, note how much of the invitation comes from the initiative of the church. Which of these initiatives are active? Which are passive (e.g. noticing the church sign)? There was little mention of the evangelism potential in the church's robust community outreach. Active presence in the community (individual or corporate) invites the curiosity of those who share the same compassion, mission, and values of church members who are engaged in some form of community service that makes a positive difference among younger adults.*

Question 4 How would you describe the greatest strength of this congregation?

Most frequently occurring responses: Outreach x 5, Accepting x 4, Friendliness x 3. This congregation values its commitment to support community ministries/services and the open, friendly environment it has created.

Observation: Many congregations would list similar strengths. Park Hill Christian Church understands itself to be a loving community, and that shows up consistently in the responses. Notice, however, the absence of theological language. (It is rare, by the way, for congregations that take part in these exercises to cite; God, "our discipleship in Christ," or a sense of call, among their greatest strengths.)

Question 5 Every congregation has a focused mission beyond providing opportunities for worship, Bible study and fellowship. From your perspective, what specific mission does Park Hill Christian Church carry out with excellence?

World outreach was mentioned more often than any other mission, followed by outreach through community services including the food pantry, Fuller House, Family Promise, Micah Ministry, sharing the building with community groups and taking care of each other.

Observation: Compassion for others lived out in financial support, service and providing a welcome for others seems to be a natural complement to a commitment to care for each other in the Park Hill Christian Church.

Question 6 Every congregation operates with a set of values that guide how we conduct ourselves. What would you say are the top three values that guide Park Hill Christian Church?

Praising, loving, and serving (*the current mission statement*) was high on the list as was a spirit of giving. Variations on acceptance, openness, welcome were common and there was mention of generations working together, Sunday school and learning about God and Scripture.

Observation: Of the three elements of the current mission statement, loving and serving seem to stand out at Park Hill Christian Church.

Question 7 What two or three leadership strengths will the next pastor of Park Hill Christian Church need to have to help this church make and equip more disciples of Jesus Christ in this part of Kansas City?

Park Hill Christian Church seeks a leader with high energy, outgoing, willing to engage with members in a friendly way and be active in the community while helping the congregation to keep what it has going currently. Members also mentioned involvement in evangelism and recruiting teachers.

Observation: Many of these descriptions may have fit Rev. Larry Patterson who is remembered fondly by many in the church for his personal efforts to grow the church many years ago.