



TO: Raytown Christian Church
FR: Regional Minister Bill Rose-Heim
RE: Report of the Congregational World Café

Introduction

At the invitation of congregational leaders, a World Café event was held in the narthex of the Raytown Christian Church at 6:00 pm on June 22, 2022. Thirty-four members participated. The event was held to give members a chance to share stories, hear one another, and identify their thoughts about the future calling as a church and about the leadership needed for this phase in their covenant live together.

At this event, members gathered about tables with six or seven participants at each table to answer seven questions. Each person at the table was invited to respond while others listened. A volunteer scribe recorded words and phrases for each round of questions. Participants (excluding the scribe) changed tables in between each round of questions and joined up with other members – some of whom they might not know well. At the end of the event, scribes shared aloud with the whole group of participants the answers to each of the questions.

At the end of this report are photos of each of the sheets completed by the scribes which list all the responses recorded during the event. (Thanks to Dave Sprick!)

This report may be shared with the congregation and is intended to assist in the completion of the Congregational Profile for the Interim Ministry Specialist Search process.

Executive Summary

Noticeable during the World Café was a prominent level of collaboration and candor. Participants enjoyed one another's company, and several noted a positive spirit in the room throughout the event. One of the distinctive qualities of the conversations was an awareness that disciple-making was an essential part of the work of the whole congregation. Evangelizing seems to take place through a variety of engagements with the community – most often through outreach.

Challenges notwithstanding, conversations during this World Café suggest that the congregation has learned much and reached out well into the community over the past several years. A core group of leaders demonstrates the kind of spiritual maturity needed for partnership with the minister that they call. The congregation has potential for an even more joyful and productive interim ministry.

This report would be incomplete without naming the conspicuous absence from most of the conversations about the recent division within the congregation over the work and workstyle of their current pastor. Conflict inevitably accompanies change of any kind from what was experienced as comfortable, reliable, and accepted as normative. The work that the current pastor has done to encourage more lay leadership in areas once thought to be exclusive domains of the clergy has, in fact, better prepared this congregation to move into a future that will, over time, resemble less its past or recent history. Conflict is promised in the congregation's future and will need to be an area of focus during the interim pastoral ministry. This is especially true if the congregation continues a course of leaning into adaptive leadership (which is the model that Jesus offered to his first disciples). Many people who join a church are not well equipped by experience or training to manage conflict toward a positive outcome and with minimal damage to relationships. There are many resources available to help congregations that want to get better results from inevitable conflicts and to create a congregational narrative that makes room for inevitable mistakes, failures, and disappointments and mines those experiences together for something good to carry along on the way toward excellence.

If the Raytown Christian Church follows through with its expressed aspirations, there is good reason to hope that God will provide all that is need for the continuity and transformation of this congregation for such a time as this. It has partners in the Greater Kansas City Region and the wider Church who are willing and able to help Raytown Christian Church to become more fully what God calls her to be.

Synopsis of Responses to Questions (*and comments from the Regional Minister*)

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

Some participants were invited, some sought a Disciples congregation, others responded to the welcome and to their experience with named members and ministers (Pat Cross, Buck Jones, Dr. Bill Tenny-Brittain, and Bo and Barb Savio). Still others mentioned the praise worship experience, music, Sunday School classes, and outreach activities. A few came to Raytown Christian Church because of their relationship to a member (marriage, friends, and growing up in the church).

Responses like these are typical and speak to a welcoming culture in the congregation. It is worth noting, however, that most of the new disciples to be invited and equipped will be outside the church – some refugees from bad church experiences, some with critical needs (companionship, a way out of poverty, physical safety and survival), and still others who do not know that what they seek may well be what Jesus and the Church can offer. Implication: Inviting people to church will have less success than taking up Jesus' invitation to "follow me" into the places of need in the community to be served.

WHEN YOU TALK WITH A FRIEND ABOUT RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH, WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Raytown Disciples have much to talk about with their friends. Community outreach is mentioned often – particularly the summer lunch programs and the Tuesday family feeding program. They talk about the music offered by the Praise Band and the prayer ministries. Elders equipped and connecting with members for prayer and pastoral care, the Stephen's Ministry, openness of the church to all people, and

the friendly welcome offered were among the other topics of conversation. Participants in the World Café found it easy to talk positively, even enthusiastically about their Church.

The activities expected in church (worship, education, pastoral care, and opportunities for direct service with the congregation and the community) provide many members with what they need and want. That said, most of the members are in the three oldest generations. Those in the three youngest generations have grown up in a world where religious activity is optional in adolescence and adulthood, and it is no longer assumed that children of Christian parents will choose to continue choosing and living in that faith.

CAN YOU REMEMBER A MOMENT IN TIME IN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH WHEN YOU EXPERIENCED POWERFULLY THE PRESENCE AND LOVE OF GOD?

Responses included a healthy mix of stories that told of receiving and giving blessings in a variety of ways. Among those experiences where the activity of others led to a sense of being in the presence of God were; the care shown when a beloved member was diagnosed with cancer, prayers offered, worship art and music, an ordination, handbell concerts, Bible studies and sermons, fellowship, special services, the prayers of elders, encouragement given to worship openly (movement, lifting hands, etc.), youth group and its leaders, witnessing the strong response to appeals for financial support in times of need, and elders gathering at the end of worship to offer prayer for anyone desiring that.

There was an equally lengthy list of responses had to do with the experiences of offering ministry, praying for others, participating in mission trips, helping with the various community outreach efforts of the congregation, planning and leading “Souled Out” worship, and making new disciples of Jesus.

Recognizing the presence and power of God among us is vital to sustaining faith, hope, and love amidst the many challenges and distractions of life. It is refreshing to note that by this point in the World Café exercise, there were more smiles and a markedly positive tone in the conversations around tables.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE CURRENT MISSION OF RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

One group summarized their response this way: “Make disciples (of Jesus Christ) by reaching out to the community/people in need.” Responses like this one arose out of conversations at three other tables. Other statements included survival, keeping the doors open for the community and members, drawing people in, and to grow.

It is becoming rarer among congregations that engage in the World Café exercise to cite “making disciples” such a significant part of their sense of mission. Something good has happened here. Many congregations are eager to grow membership (which can often be motivated primarily by concerns for survival of the congregation and support for its existing members). Making and equipping disciples is challenging work – especially today in a polarized culture where disinformation, misbehavior, and violence attract more attention than the good that God and God’s people are doing. That Raytown Christian Church understands that the Great Commission is still an essential part of any Disciples congregational mission is encouraging.

Missing from the congregational mission is any mention of covenant relationship with the wider Church. If the Disciples of Christ “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world” is to gain traction, it will need more than congregational gifts to the Disciples Mission Fund. This is, unfortunately, not unusual in the Greater Kansas City Region. More effective partnership among DOC congregations could benefit those congregations – offering mutual support and a healthy accountability for outcomes that honor God and advance the realization of Jesus’ vision for community life here “on earth as it is in heaven.”

CAN YOU REMEMBER A TIME WHEN YOU WERE ASKED TO SHARE ONE OF YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO HELP ADVANCE THE MISSION OF RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

Given the number of responses from each table, it was clear that nearly everyone experienced an invitation to share one or more of their spiritual gifts with the congregation. In addition to the usual list of worship activities (including playing, singing and leading music, public prayer, AV/online tech support, greeting, etc.), some were invited help with pastoral care, teach Bible studies, organize and lead/help with ongoing and periodic community outreach programs, bring communion to those shut-in, lead discipleship classes, organize and lead mission trips, serve in scouting programs that meet on the church campus, and lead community prayer.

The invitation to know and share spiritual gifts is encouraged in this congregation and bodes well for disciple-making. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is less about accepting an invitation to heaven after life on earth and more about becoming who we are created by God to be in partnership with Jesus which requires that we come to learn who we are, how we are gifted, and applying our gifts in concert with others to bring about Jesus’ vision for the Church.

There was a time when evangelism meant calling people to accept Christ as savior and lord, then belonging to a congregation and, later, to perform some ministry. Today, disciple-making – particularly among the unchurched turns this process around. We may find people whom Christ wishes to reach at the places where significant needs are being met, among unchurched fellow volunteers who may later (inspired by the example and integrity of their Christian co-workers) begin to inquire about faith.

GIVEN ALL THE CHANGES IN THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE IN OUR (CITY, COUNTY, COUNTRY), THE INEQUITIES THAT ARE NOW WELL-DOCUMENTED, AND GIVEN WHO WE ARE AS CHURCH IN THIS MOMENT, WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS CALLING RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO DO DIFFERENTLY?

Participants listed a number of opportunities for making and deepening connection within the community; the high school across the street from the church campus, the other churches that meet on this campus, and partnership with churches of other denominations in the community. Internally, there were recommendations for deeper unity among members, for more occasions when worshippers at the two services make connections, recognizing that for many youth and young adults that worship is not as much of a draw as it is for the older members. There were calls for more joy, more acceptance of differences, better communication, recognizing and responding to the changing demographic of the area served by this congregation, allow the discomfort that any change requires, and providing activities for children.

Many participants do understand the benefit of deeper and wider connection with the community and the value of partnership with other churches. Some recognize that there are benefits to working on unity within the congregation even as together they reach out to serve. It is important that many realize that the neighborhood is changing around the church campus. The congregation is populated mostly with members of Euro-American ancestry. The faster growing communities in Raytown have different ancestries and significant differences in religious and social cultures. Will Christians (of all denominations) continue to segregate intentionally or unintentionally? Is a multi-cultural congregation more or less effective as a partner in the work shared by all Christians of various ancestries and cultures? These are questions that face the whole Church, and this may be a question for this congregation.

IF RAYTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS TO BECOME EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE AT MAKING AND EQUIPPING NEW DISCIPLES (MATTHEW 28:16-20) AND LOVING GOD AND OUR NEIGHBORS WITH ALL THAT WE HAVE AND ARE, (MATTHEW 22:34-40), WHAT WILL WE NEED FROM OUR INTERIM PASTOR AND EACH OTHER TO MOVE INTO THAT BETTER FUTURE?

From one another, participants mentioned; open hearts, be teachable, focus as one, move away from decades old status quo, change our expectations, grace, better communication, new ideas, compassion for each other, more effort at evangelism, more of us to step up and volunteer, and be supportive of a new minister. From an interim minister, need/desire expressed included inspiring sermons, help with healing, presence locally, peacemaker, unifier, "how to" guidance for leading out (in the community), understand young people and assist with making new youth-oriented initiatives, help to prepare us for a long-term pastor.