

AUG 1 CONGREGATIONAL CONVERSATION RESPONSES – FULL SET

This document contains all the responses collected at the Congregational Conversation on August 1, 2021. They are sorted to help readability, but the comments themselves are unedited. For a summary please see AUG 1 CONG CONV SUMMARY.

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WHAT DID YOU HEAR THAT CONCERNS OR INTERESTS YOU?

Decline

- 1/3 of churches not here in 10 years
- Churches are declining - again I knew but it's concerning
- Decline
- Decline in church
- Decline in old first decline in church attendance and membership in the past years
- Decline in participation
- Decline of our church and dissatisfaction within
- Decline of religion in the US in particular
- Decline of the broader church
- Declining membership
- Downward trajectory
- Membership & attendance decline
- The decline of people interested in attending church
- The general decline of religion - concern
- The general decrease of people attending church/membership/religion - both interests and concerns me
- The sharp declines - concern
- Expressed reality of the decline
- The 4 reasons for the decline: 1. sermons do not relate to everyday life 2. sermons too [...] boring 3. conflict with today's moral value 4. conflict with other social opportunities; nothing was said to address the above

Catalyst for God's love/Mission

- "Catalyst for God's love in the borough"
- Focus of mission to improve things - have more social impact (interest)
- Focus on local mission
- How do we "change the world" in Chester County?
- How to capitalize on being an "in town" church
- Inspiring to think of what we could do as a community focused on social and institutional change.
- Interest that being catalyst in boro
- interest that people want to do mission
- Look and listen to community needs -= then follow them to help (outreach)
- Mission-focus
- social concerns (mission)
- The three emerging themes are great yet the borough one may not be a large enough boundray. Where are our congregants coming from? Is it all the borough or is it larger? How do you find the right balance?
- Community is more than WC Borough - concern

Low satisfaction/Low energy

- Low energy
- Low energy/satisfaction - concern
- The low energy low satisfaction concerns me
- The survey results about satisfaction made me feel both validated in the feelings I have been having, and also concerned about how we let it get to this point.
- Dissatisfaction/low energy
- Energy
- Energy - mission - community activities that unify us
- How to increase energy
- Number of disgruntled members in our church
- Surprised by low energy/low satisfaction - how much had to do with pandemic - doesn't square with my experience of church
- We need to have specific goals to inspire energy in the church.

Lack of younger people/families

- Concerned that younger families not coming in. What do we need to do
- The lack of young people
- Attract more families
- Family
- How to get more younger people attending
- How we reach out to next gen - concern

- Need younger members w/ different concerns/ideas who are energetic and willing to lead onward.
- We need to make a change - mission-driven to attract young people
- Youth programs that are exciting to youth
- The relationship between what under 35 and over want in a church

Low hospitality score

- Hospitality score is extremely low
- Low hospitality score
- Being more welcoming - interest
- Failure to learn names and connect with others
- Name tags

Gospel/Bible-based

- Attract youth - hold with biblical truths
- Bible based truths & sermons with humor & meaning
- Did not hear need to understand & present the gospel. The purpose of church is not to change social systems.
- No gospel focus in broad themes

Trust/Transparency

- Need clear, open communication to develop trust.
- Need more info on what is going on? Congregation feels they don't get enough information?
- Trusted leadership is important - need to build up that trust.

Age of congregation

- Age of members
- Aging congregation
- Aging of the congregation
- Older congregants

Need to be forward-looking

- Forward looking
- Look to the future, not the past - interests
- Makes sense with worship of "Bill Hess days". Nostalgic over past - but I only hear about it from 2nd or 3rd hand
- More commitment to find our future
- Too many focused on the past

Broader engagement

- Need "new" people on Session/sub committees not recycling of previous people.
- Same people doing everything
- Lack of engagement
- Effectively marketing internally - interest

Marketing/new members

- How can we add variety to our offerings so as to broaden our appeal?
- How to get new members
- Marketing effectively to target audience in a way that resonates - interest
- Need to find out what would make people want to come? Market research.

Hope

- Hope in our healthy staff
- There is hope - interest
- This is an awakening - not a destiny (closing a door)

Next pastor

- Do we need a young minister, a "turnaround" leader.
- Inspirational speaker? As new minister
- What does everyone want out of a head pastor. Why would a head pastor stop you from doing wonderful acts of God on your own. Its his words that should be inspiring, not necessarily holding your hand.

Relevance

- Irrelevance of church
- People do not feel church is relevant

Other

- There is no drive for evangelism (because it doesn't matter).
- Overlooking personal spiritual walks with God
- Interesting: saw a pattern of not being able to commit to a thought or idea for the congregation.
- Not shocked at all by the information presented
- One of the reasons kids are not in church is because sports in Public schools have changed. Many have games/practice on Sunday morning. Don't know the answer to that.
- Parking problem on workdays

- Our own responses were, unfortunately, realistic and true
- Nothing. I am not worried.
- Physical church
- Flexibility (lack of) - concern
- Improve small groups - interest
- The cultural impact of how we are demeaning leaders was an astute observation and one worth exploring here at 1st Pres.
- Attendance
- "Programming" --> good, but there needs to be purpose
- Catholics increasing new folks why?
- Church is meant to be "me/us serving the church" not "the church serving me"
- Community
- Extravert - engaged pastor
- Forgetting why we're here
- Getting church members to work together for change
- Goal of trying to bring in new members --> there needs to be a balance with this
- Good Bible studies
- How can we be unique? Not same as YMCA
- How much time do we have left before expenses exceed income - concern
- More visible mission results - interest
- New focus on growth
- New program direction
- Opinion: I have always enjoyed attending First Pres. The people, the service, and belief. The first time through David Pickett. However there is more of a "wish" here, than an action. I was part of United Methodist. Perhaps you should attend their Session!
- Right now we have "The old ladies circles & Bible studies." Young people don't want to come.
- The fact that you have to be down to go up. And the fact we need to energize the community and the youth.
- Too white - want diversity
- We are not unique!
- While I am concerned about the statistics on church engagement & attendance worldwide, I am less concerned about what's happening to "everyone" and more concerned about "are we doing our best to be the best we can be at the end of the day?"
- Worship experience

WHAT ABOUT THE VISION THEMES RESONATE WITH YOU AND INSPIRE YOU?

Catalyst for God's love/Mission

- J.O. - I have an idea that will employ 35 & under and 65 plus values and ideas, while at the same time impact and engage the community (consists of long term planning and help for many).
- "Role up our sleeves" to make a difference
- Addressing societal problems, both locally and nationally. Promotion of discussion of problems and how a Christian should address them (some of this is done now, but it should be supporter from the alter.
- Being a catalyst for God's love.
- Catalyst for God's love in the borough
- Catalyst for love in the borough
- Concern: "we" are in the borough, but the membership is not.
- Consider use of building next door to help community
- Deeper into mission with involvement
- Desire for social & institutional change
- Focus on needs of community
- Greater reaching out to borough.
- Helping those in the community with (spiritual, physical, and mental) needs
- local mission must be a focus; young, old
- Make our church LOCAL (meaning W.C. Boro) mission available and attractive to "marginal kids." No parking problem there. They can walk. Learn an alternative to street violence. Maybe even develop future leaders in ministry.
- Mission actions
- Mission actions cc meeting people's needs (young people, college students) ministry to LGBTQ+
- Mission work only local
- Mission-focus - especially within our local area - all of the congregation should be involved in some capacity of mission involvement in the (not just financially)
- neighborhood focus --> engagement with the borough
- Now we have an opportunity to use our buildings next door for mission
- Passion for mission
- Showing God's love in the borough - I feel I like we need to open our eyes to the struggles of everyone in WC, not just our members.
- Social impact importance
- The under 35 priority - "change the world" vs the over 35 priority - attract more/younger members/families - they're symbiotic - requires flexibility and a lot of adaptability
- Utilize what we have - ex: building next store for refugees

- We need to focus on mission and serving people as God wants us to do.
- With Matthew 25, we have started what we seem to believe we need.
- Support programs which is how support community with above listed needs
- Make it exciting enough for volunteers
- In my estimation, it is actively living into “above all, love”. As difficult at that may be at times. Engaging with curiosity, empathy and compassion. Service to one another and to those outside of the walls of our church in ways that are humble and unassuming. Working to break down the “country club” feel that our church sometimes maintains and getting into the “real” of faith, of service, of doubt, of curiosity. These things are already happening in book studies, conversations, CE initiatives, prayer, hymns (during 10:42). This is the “sailboat” stuff of a church - allowing the Holy Spirit to blow in, shake everything to its essential parts, and leave folks invigorated.

Building the Body/Community

- Being focused on welcoming all lifestyles and ages
- Build a stronger community to attract young families
- Build community within congregation
- Building body - especially community
- Building the body
- Building the body as a learning and community building focus is great
- Building the body for future
- Moments of mission - longer - work together know each other better
- More opportunities to connect
- Name knowing - name tags permanent
- New members mentor - shepherd for a year
- Opportunities for fellowship
- Rebuilding community in our church
- Small groups - something different than what is there now (otherwise it is just the same thing)
- Strong with caregiving
- We need to encourage "small groups" a way of promoting feeling of "belonging" and accountability and support.
- We need to have members who are willing to introduce themselves to strangers/new members and connect with them. Create that "wow" factor for a stranger/new member
- That First Presbyterian is a place that exudes unassuming love. People get a “feel” for a place, simply by walking in especially if they are seeking. My hope is that they feel unconditional acceptance, love that feebly attempts to mimic the love God shows. And that people are open to sharing doubts and fears about living into a life of faith. When people are accepted for being vulnerable, faith feels more relevant. Less

abstract. And I think folks are then moved to act, both in the church and within a larger community.

Change/Future

- Change
- Encouragement to build and create a church environment for the future church
- Future of church
- I'm excited to be a part of the future of the church and re-inventing who we are and what we need to be
- Look to the future
- Seeing us go in the direction God is leading us to go
- That it is possible to refocus - more upward
- That we need to do today so our church is here for future generations
- That we want to change
- The hope that the type of pastor we are looking for will hopefully help us move forward toward our goal
- They're hopeful and look forward.
- We need to change our thinking/comfort zone
- Willingness to look forward
- Green line - redirect priorities

Equipping Worship

- continue with the visible and inspirational music worship and involve more members to participate this should include more of the youth. Currently the involvement of WCU students of music and students of WCU.
- Equipping worship
- Equipping worship with more inspirational messages
- Having worship service midweek
- Provide visual streaming message of sermons in church (ongoing) we provide hearing assistance now (which helps).
- building and evolving worship --> inclusivity in worship

Growth

- Build for growth
- Common goal to grow the church
- do more to reach out to those online, expand audience
- Find ways to influence people to come
- Reaching new people

Age/Younger People

- Involve children...to activities including music ministry.
- The possibility of engaging young families
- We need young people to come to church.
- Age of members
- Move the young 50 and below to get involved and become a vital part of church worship

Questions

- Can we be a big tent church and be an instrument agency for change?
- I think all 3 encapsulate our church but do they capture the external folks we hope to reach? Are we too self-focused to consider what will draw others?
- I'm confused by the focus on our next senior pastor when our challenge is that we're clergy focused. I expected to have our focus on whether our congregation is ready to change and what traits or qualities we need to develop to build energy and satisfaction.
- Question: what increase in attendance would there be if 50% of our children/grandchildren attended?
- Will those three be a draw?

Other

- Leadership should be in agreement for goals & shared path we should know
- Need for more transparency between leadership (session)
- Our main vision - teaching understanding of Scripture IN ITS ENTIRETY!
- People are seeking - we need to [?] what & offer it make it Christ based.
- Embrace and encourage congregational diversity
- Dispel the myth that believing in set principles does not mean a Christian is "hateful"
- Having a clear moral conscience and being unapologetic for it.
- Ask someone personally not a volunteer
- Christian Education & youth groups rated high
- Don't look back to blame
- Jesus is here every day. Not just Sunday.
- Moving away from pastor centered focus
- tools to inspire our own children & grown children to attend

WHAT TRAITS AND QUALITIES DO WE NEED IN OUR NEXT SENIOR PASTOR TO ACCOMPLISH THE VISION OF OUR FUTURE?

Commitment to mission/community

- Awareness of unique kind of community
- Be willing to go out in the community & preach at other churches & invite those people in
- Community care
- Community church
- Community involved in organizations
- Has an understanding of Chester County & the potential
- Outreach to WC/boro
- Outward facing
- Passionate about growth and community outreach
- Reaching out to youth
- Commitment to Missions
- Community focused
- Community-oriented
- Locally focused
- Love for the borough
- Mission minded
- Mission-focused
- Mission-focused
- Mission-oriented --> external facing
- Need more emphasis on "mission builders" outside local area!
- Outward mission focused
- Effectively "market" the church to next gen w/ local mission work
- Connect with the borough on parking - how we serve the borough

Personable/People person

- A pastor who has a personality of "caring, interest, and warmth for the members - this was definitely lacking in previous pastor which caused many to change churches after his 10-year ministry - he still did not know my name - despite being a regular attender, and reminded him often.
- Extroverted
- Gets to know members by name
- Good people skills - not necessarily a good administrator
- Knows the congregation
- Outgoing
- Outgoing personality

- People person
- People person
- Personable
- Personal connections
- Very approachable
- Warm and friendly
- Warm/outgoing
- Approachable
- Someone who is engaging, friendly, that interacts with all the aspects and different age groups
- Someone who wants to know people deeply
- Inviting/caring
- More involved in individuals' lives (church members and community members)
- Engaging internally & externally

Strong faith/spiritual

- Re-evaluate what it means to live as Christians
- Ability to discern God's truths and impart them w/ love
- Act in faith
- Christ based
- Christ-centered vision and preaching
- Focused on scripture as applicable to our service and mission
- Knowledgeable in down to earth Christianity
- Love of Christ, willing to share it.
- Minister who cares about the Gospel. Each person in the church & set goals for evangelizing youth. Preach about Revelation and living a Christian life daily.
- Not too heavy theologically
- Scripture as it applies to today
- Scripture-based teaching in worship
- Spirit-filled and lead
- Spiritual/God-centered
- Spirit driven
- Strong effort on "Jesus"
- Willingness to preach the ten commandments in face of problems facing society.

Good speaker/good preacher

- A good public speaker - preferably a Dale Carnegie graduate
- Dynamic speaker
- Sermons relate to daily struggles of congregation
- Sermons relate to everyday life

- Strong from the pulpit
- Engaging in the pulpit - easy to follow message
- Good preacher
- Good speaker
- Good speaker
- Inspiring & informational sermons and maybe new format for sermon - not lecture format
- Proven record pulpiter (history of good preaching)
- Inspiring personally - in worship

Caring/Pastoral Care

- "Shepherd to the Sheep"
- Caring
- Compassionate
- Empathetic
- Hospital - home visits
- Pastor who is concerned with spiritual, physical, and mental needs. Pastor visits those with above needs
- Someone who wants to minister to people, visit people who are sick, not go to meetings
- Supportive
- Visit members who "hurt"
- Pastoral care not "CEO" attitude

Younger

- 40 or younger
- Pastor - 40 years old or less
- Under 40 years old
- Young at heart
- Young in mind and spirit
- Younger feeling
- Youthful
- Less formal. Younger with ambition to share hope with everyone.

Trustworthy

- Ability to develop trusted leadership
- Honest
- Honest & open about difficult issues facing the church - not trying to "hide" them
- Need transparency
- Someone candid and transparent

- Transparent communication.
- Trustworthy
- Trustworthy

Inclusive

- Awareness of uniqueness of WC - diversity
- Be inclusive, not exclusive
- Demonstrates D & I
- Diverse engagement
- Inclusive and open minded - strives for diversity
- Open & biased towards all views
- Open to inclusive
- Welcoming to all lifestyles

Open-minded/Open to new ideas

- Can bring discussion and insights that are fresh and new. Thought provoking.
- encourages brainstorming - from members
- fresh & new ideas
- imagination - creativity.
- imagination & creativity
- Open minded
- Open-minded.
- Flexible - ability to foster new ideas! Not have preset ideas!

Ability to challenge us

- A willingness to challenge others
- Ability to challenge with empathy and compassion
- Challenge us
- Challenge us
- Compassionate but willing to challenge
- Someone willing to challenge the congregation
- Someone willing to push the congregation to change

Connect with all ages

- That he can connect with younger families/young people
- Communicate with all ages
- Push us & our thoughts on how to bring in young families & then change
- Relates to all age groups

- We need a pastor who will be mission oriented and be able to be a good communicator with ALL ages and walks of life. He needs to show his love for Jesus and his mission on earth.
- Need for finding(?) what appeals to "youth" (age 16-49) and include in men's church
- Awareness of youth needs - but also elders who have/are supporting

Ability to inspire/motivate

- Ability to inspire change/adaptability & connecting the priorities of the >35 and <35
- Ability to inspire, not to prescribe exactly how we should think or what we should do
- Ability to motivate congregation
- Engaged leader - looking towards future
- Inspire adaptability and change
- Effective in engaging/inspiring

Energy/enthusiasm

- Be enthusiastic
- Energetic
- Energy
- Energy
- Enthusiastic & motivational
- High energy

Good listener/communicator

- Effective listening
- Good communicator
- Good listener
- Good listener
- Listener
- A positive, listener, trustworthy, open & unbiased, drawing scripture into everything

Take on hard issues/appropriate risks

- Compassionate leader not afraid to make bold moves or take on big issues
- Is able to speak & listen about thoughts/ideas/"hard" topics with a yes attitude
- Someone who is less concerned with optics and pleasing everyone, and more concerned with doing hard work that needs to be done.
- Willing to take risks where appropriate/feasible

Ability to lead change

- A person who can help us enact our desire for change.
- Accept "change" unless it denies Christ's truth.
- Catalyst for change
- Committed to change
- Someone willing to embrace the turmoil

Ability to inspire/motivate

- Engage us
- Outstanding pastor to motivate new mission to bring vitality to a motivated church.
- Passionate leader
- To include a charismatic minister with transparent integrity and devotion who is capable of inspiring others
- Uplifting, hopefully

Ability to lead worship

- Flexibility in worship time - older folks can't get here for 9am
- Variety of worship styles
- Worship time with Quiet to "feel" communion times
- Contemplative worship

Focus on future/vision

- Ability to help people stop talking about "how we used to do it" and get them thinking about how they can help move the church forward.
- Focused on helping us become the best church we can be
- Respectfully focused on the future
- Willing to help us create a vision/transformation

In tune with society

- In-tune with society
- Talks in today's env and relays it well
- Worldly
- Modern day issues & relate it back

Creative

- Creative
- Creative & working outside the box
- Creative ideas - how to reach neighbors
- Creativity

Conflict management skills

- Conflict resolution skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Conflict resolution/management abilities = dealing with the uncomfortable aspects of change

Flexible

- Flexibility
- Flexible

Ability to delegate

- Delegating pastor
- Delegator

Positive attitude

- Positive attitude
- Positive attitude

Good with social media

- Social media
- Use social media effective to communicate our commitments & successes

Good teacher

- Participation in Adult Education
- strong teacher

Gender/Race/Enthnicity

- Begin with a male. (Sorry - but more men would be attracted to a man Pastor).
- Diverse person (woman, color)
- Person of color and/or a woman

Other

- Ability to build the "Big Tent" mentality (it does not feel as apparent today as it once did)
- Tough skin
- We need a Bill Wilson.

- Committed to social justice issues
- Example setter
- Need to choose the "right" senior pastor. Was once told that the pastor of the church is not why you should join. It's good to like him (her) but that's not why you should join.
- Sense of humor
- Someone who is educated about & conscious of protection of children
- The search committee for new pastor may need to be more transparent - to enhance better selection of the kind of pastor with strong leadership toward moving others back to true lives of Christianity - a more genuine sincere honest charismatic
- Would find small group home visits can be motivational sources - feedback to the congregation. While this is more social its spiritual element can be very moving spiritually.
- Non CEO type pastor
- Real
- Encourages/insist that members introduce themselves to anyone new
- Experience with churches with similar turnaround issues - results?
- Leadership
- strong leadership
- Confident
- Deep thinking
- Humble
- Intellectual
- Strong budget management
- Strong self management