

All-Church Listening Session Notes

January 11, 2020

Attendees: Sheida Carroll, Phil DiSciullo, Terri Bracy, Joanna Begin, Erin Sennott, Paul Sennott, Ray Santiago, Joanna Ostrander, Susan D'Arcy Fuller, Rev. Branwen Cook, Kim Grubb, Joy Harris, Kathy Williams, Lisa Parker, Julie Roberts, Fraelean Curtis, Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade, Jessica Sollee, Gini Berthiaume, Bruce Roberts (phone), Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer (phone), Bailey Henderson

11:10 am: Joanna called the meeting to order. Rev. Branwen began with a prayer and a moment of silence.

11:12 am: Joanna explains the intention of the group setting, as well as setting the group agreements to be accepted by all attendees.

Kathy requests that everyone make a commitment to listen so everyone can be heard. This includes not stopping anyone from speaking and not interrupting the thoughts of others.

11:23 am: Erin reads the invitation and email that regarding the meeting. Attendees take a few minutes to write three topics they want addressed during the meeting.

11:34 am: Joanna reads and organizes the topic requests shared by everyone. The various topics were written: Faith & Film, is our model working/revising bylaws, ARTChurch, what is our financial future, transparency of hiring process, how to improve communication between LC and congregation, Susan Corso, revisiting Crossroads and what that looks like, Messy Church, and reaching out to the community.

Joanna derived three main categories for meeting direction: **Feelings on Susan Corso + Communication + Transparency (8 sticky notes)**, **God's Work in the Community (6 sticky notes)**, and **Revisiting Crossroads Process + Financial Stability (9 sticky notes)**.

12:04 pm: **Feelings on Susan Corso + Communication + Transparency (8 sticky notes)**

Kathy requests the LC is more transparent with the congregation about the hiring process, including follow ups, having opinions be heard and acknowledged. The Susan Corso situation lacked these requests, which is a "symptom" of the problems in the church.

Erin wants a clarification for "what recommendations about opening that communication channel?"

Kathy suggests having a discussion before the annual meeting, to rethink the hiring process as there is a lot the LC deals with, to bring back the hiring committee, as "we have set up a system that doesn't work".

Joanna details the hiring process and the various perspectives that included with each hiring pool.

Joy claims that process wasn't followed with Susan Corso, where concerns and conflicts of interest were not heard. There was a breach of trust and confidentiality as Joy states

she and Corso had never had a conversation but was included in Corso's letter. Due to the comments made in the letter, Joy believes the information could have only been shared by other members of the church. She questions what exactly Corso was paid to consult for as she had more information for other situations than were necessary.

Rev. Wendy allows a moment of silence for everyone to respect and acknowledge Joy's experience.

Fraelean questions if there are biases/judgements involved, and how we perceive someone when they're hired?

Rev. Branwen suggests everyone attempt to recognize their own biases and that everyone wants to be involved at different levels – the church doesn't gatekeep anyone from participating in things via baptisms/tithes/etc.

Terri emphasizes that while certain requests are not implemented in final decisions, that doesn't mean the requests weren't heard.

Erin describes what action she will take in the future, i.e. sending out notices before the annual meeting with clarifying details of what will be discussed.

Paul agrees that the congregational bylaws should be revised on a technical and drafting level, as it could be cleaned up for understandability.

Joanna declares the group has reached the end of the twenty minutes allotted for this topic. She asks for final thoughts.

Bruce (phone) magnifies Joy's experience and the hurt she has regarding the situation.

Julie requests the minutes of LC meetings be sent out to everyone.

Terri suggests that those minutes would need to be filtered, due to confidential information that gets discussed at LC meetings.

Gini reiterates the scope of work for the LC, asking if there are enough bodies for all the tasks – there's concern that the LC could be worn out if not careful.

Rev. Wendy clarifies the timeline of the hiring process and that the congregation didn't hear about every candidate as there were many over a nine-month period.

Erin confirms she will work on sending out the LC minutes as they're able.

Kathy suggests an **intranet** for all involved members to have access to the minutes/other information.

Rev. Wendy briefly accounts the upcoming meetings, the LC retreat in February, the Visionary meeting in March/April, the Annual meeting in June, and asks how the church can assess current progress through the lens of moving forward.

12:34 pm: Joanna moves forward to the next topic: **God's Work in the Community (6 sticky notes)**

Jessica describes her new relationship with Sanctuary and what it means to her to be involved with "the most incredible church [she's] been to", and how Sanctuary has touched every need she's looked for in a church. She's a new member of only a week [at

the time of the meeting]. She describes the micro-pantry and the Gallery, asking the members to not “lose sight of the big picture”.

Rev. Branwen vocalizes the excitement of member/congregational involvement in the community, emphasizing on the experimental nature of Sanctuary, and how this model is reaching younger audiences and non-believers.

Terri emphasizes ARTChurch, faith and film, community involvement, and how she will sometimes fill in for worship.

Susan appreciates ARTChurch, describing that she thinks Sanctuary is very different than other churches in the area, so if it were to stop, the community would lose something special as Sanctuary provides the space for “bringing in people who don’t know where they belong”.

Fraelean describes her inspiration by the various things in the community, and how she tries to “appreciate our humanness as we are small in community”, and the commitment to the mirco-pantry moves her.

12:46 pm: A pause is taken to pass out lunch.

12:50 pm: Kathy moves to continue the conversation to **Revisiting Crossroads Process + Financial Stability (9 sticky notes)** while everyone eats, mindful of the approaching end time of the meeting.

Kathy states the church isn’t growing and is not financially stable, questioning “what did the world need from us?” then and is Sanctuary something the world/community needs now? Sanctuary was a bold risk to take and the benchmarks were put in place five years ago to meet specific milestones, which she claims the church has not met. With a 2.3-million-dollar budget, it’s time to reconsider what Sanctuary is doing. It’s time to revisit the Crossroads process, and Crossroads should not be ignored.

Erin asks, “what would a revisit look like?”.

Kathy suggests making changes such as bringing back deacons and fixing the bylaws as a symbol of changes Sanctuary has made. She also says that materials about Crossroads should be sent out to the congregation for a clearer understanding of what it was, “the way it used to be wasn’t working”, but that the church should look at what was working.

Joanna requests to pause for a moment for a reflection on the church being together, to look at how far everyone has come.

Fraelean iterates the value of Crossroads and is willing to learn more about it, but asks, “does it fully apply to us today?”.

Joy explains Crossroads more fully, stating it was an “intense, two-year process” where everyone agreed to review where the church was at in five years. The five-year mark has since passed and no evaluation was conducted. The big concerns include financial sustainability and membership numbers. She says she felt “sidelined” by the church leaders ignoring Crossroads.

Rev. Wendy points out the Crossroads information is on the Congregational Church of West Medford website. She also states that she interpreted the benchmarks as “goals”

and not steadfast requirements. That time was full of adjustments and discovery, there will need to be a certain kind of discernment process again – maybe looking at other experimental churches. She reiterates that measures of success are different, and Sanctuary must define what success looks like in this model.

Joanna suggests that everyone be “very honest about where we are”, and that she finds it interesting that some members interpreted the benchmarks as losses, where she feels like the benchmarks have been hit. She wonders how to reconcile the gauge of success when the community engagement is 200 but it’s only 35 on paper? She questions “how Crossroads has morphed over time?” and how the church can use it as a framework moving forward.

Kathy discerns Sanctuary as a small congregation using a large congregation’s budget. She suggests a budget reevaluation.

Susan states that every benchmark goal doesn’t have to be met, but is the church acting as good and faithful stewards? She doesn’t think it has to be viewed as a business arrangement entirely, asking “what are we providing?”.

Joy claims that “where we are now is where we were then”, and that Sanctuary is still struggling with the same problems.

Susan brings up that Sanctuary is a different option for people and there is engagement with the right people now.

Rev. Wendy agrees that there should be an assessment and a dig through the records would be beneficial, but “what do we want to measure?” as the church moves forward. She reiterates that money and member numbers are not the only measures of success. She poses that everyone should look for authentic clarity on how to frame the next steps. She describes her effort in training for a new leadership style in order to be fit with Sanctuary’s model.

Rev. Wendy asks for final thoughts.

Kim explains that a reevaluation should be conducted out of respect for the ancestors who built the old church. It’s less about the money and more about the history and moving forward with the historical intent included. If the budget isn’t utilized properly, it’s disrespecting the church’s history and how that money was obtained. She emphasizes that everything needs to be reevaluated now, and not pushed off for another year.

1:30 pm: Terri concludes with a closing prayer, everyone sang *Sanctuary* and the meeting is adjourned.

Addendum: Rev. Tom sent in his thoughts after the meeting, listed here in full:

“I am impressed that an angel is used as a speaking icon. It brings to mind an exercise the theologian Walter Wink proposed in the second book of his ‘Powers’ trilogy, titled *Unmasking the Powers*. In chapter 3 Wink writes about the angel of the church: ‘The angel gathers up into a single whole all the aspirations and grudges, hopes and vendettas, fidelity and unfaithfulness of a given community of believers, and lays it all before God for judgment, correction, and healing.’

While I was living in Medford, I was present with you in worship, in community meetings, at a few service projects, and for a couple of special celebrations. I don't have as long a shared memory as most of you have, which may afford me a little more objectivity about Sanctuary in the world. I do have a long and particular memory about the church in the world, and that likely calls me to a certain humility about how to share with you what I see and hear. Which is this.

The world and all human communities in it need to hear human witness to the movement of the Spirit among us. We all need to hear trustworthy testimony from one another. I can say about my experience in worship with you all that I found encouragement and inspiration there. On the other hand, your struggles with governance and mission seem to reflect the struggles of the world today; no doubt they also present evidence of the wounding of the local church in West Medford, extending deep into the history of this community and its people.

Wink's chapter on The Angels of the Churches resolves, sort of, with this observation: 'If we accept and love the wounded angel, praying for a vision of its true potentiality (rather than imposing our own), and engaging with others in the struggle to discern the true nature of its calling, then the whole congregation may move toward it organically.'