

Notes from the Congregational Conversation held on 12/5/2021 after worship

There were approximately 50 people present, seated at tables of eight (or almost eight) in Fellowship Hall. Participants included a wide range of members from one person who is considering membership but has been attending worship to one who joined before 1949. Diverse viewpoints were also represented. We shared lunch and fellowship. Pastors Vicki and Carole led the conversation. Pastor Carole opened the meeting.

We began with the introduction of a covenant regarding how we were to interact with each other: we would only speak for ourselves, we will listen respectfully to others' speaking and we will not correct/shut down what others share as long as all are respectful.

Pastor Carole then led a short Bible study, reading 1 Corinthians 3:4-9. When asked what stood out for them in the text, people shared that God brought the growth, there are different jobs for different people, we are merely human with a common purpose. No one is more important and a dose of humility does wonders. We are greater together and more than the sum of our parts.

In conclusion, it was said that part of St. Lucas' problem is that we do not recognize/accept all individual beliefs. The bridge is compassion.

Over the two hours that we were together, three questions were posed for conversation. The tables discussed them and then shared their observations. The notes below have been transcribed from large sheets of paper and were taken at the time. Pastors Vicki and Carole took the notes and led the large group conversation. The notes follow.

The first question was how do you experience St. Lucas now?

- Holding pattern (mentioned twice)
- Needing to come together
- Emerging focus on mission
- Open up to others/St. Lucas has plenty of resources
- A feeling of insecurity – what is my place at St. Lucas? Feeling threatened.
- Need to talk to each other, come back to a common purpose
- Feeling the loss of traditional worship (creeds and traditional Communion were specifically named). We need to do worship the way St. Lucas has “always” done it.

- St. Lucas is a bit stagnant – need to choose a direction and move forward, reach out to others (and missing folks) and make all feel welcome.
- Important to reach out to others (people missed and visitors)
- St. Lucas is a church in transition; not as much going on in person
- We aren't working together
- Lacking tradition, we need to go back to the way St. Lucas always did things (specifically mentioned creeds and Communion tableware)
- We've lost a big chunk of the congregation
- Lack of clarity about the cause of conflict
- Loss of strong youth program, lack of children
- St. Lucas is smaller but has strong core group
- There is an emerging focus on mission
- People are afraid of sharing ideas because of conflict (partly problem with politics polarizing people)
- A sense of loss – why are people gone?
- On the verge of great possibilities, small but mighty
- How large of a church are we?
- Positive, strong pastoral leadership
- Looking more to the future
- Feels lonely – loss of members or COVID?
- Differing agendas
- There are people with ideas but afraid to speak because of division

The second question was how did you experience St. Lucas when you first joined?

- Was more active – cliques. But if there's greater participation, then people feel more connected
- Dr. Aldridge was the pastor (He was beloved, but more than one person remembered him saying, "Women in leadership means the men won't step up")

- Dr. Clark was pastor (Remembered he said, “Don’t check your brain at the door”)
- Rev. Martinson would bring a variety of folks in (this was in the 50’s and 60’s – the church was growing)
- St. Lucas was connected to the UCC entities
- Large Confirmation classes – but then they were gone. Confirmed right out of the church
- Good youth program
- 1990’s, full pews, cliques. Hard to break in, but once you were in was good
- 1970 came; now fewer young folks
- Let’s not focus only on golden past
- Dr. Campbell, Dr. Clark, Dr. Aldridge named. St. Lucas was a vibrant village, home away from home; pews full; cliques named again. Question: How can we be more open and welcoming?
- We were comfortable, not challenged. Today requires challenge
- Large numbers meant people could hide and not participate
- Many generations worshiped together, it was family oriented
- Youth program was vital
- St. Lucas was vibrant and active with a large fellowship. Now there is a loss of fellowship and feeling nostalgic
- Individual comments: Before 1949 came, always felt welcome, active do-ers, some cliques, “been through more than 30 ministers and not leaving.” Another: been here 18 years, born and raised Catholic, first visit here felt no Spirit but that changed. Cliques. Another: 7 years here, spouse Catholic but wanted more inclusive. Another: Lifelong member, not leaving, am a thinking Christian and mature in my faith.

The last question was how do you see St. Lucas’ future, let’s dream a little bit

- Compassionate church, more positive, no fighting, be open to differences.

- Meet the needs of the people – other support groups (e.g., divorced support group)
- Be better listeners
- Make sure Friendship Village and older folks engaged
- Contemporary service
- Pre-school as farm system – invite and nurture those families (mentioned three times)
- Minister to folks with needs e.g., lonely, anxious
- Youth – are parents encouraging them?
- Stronger virtual presence
- What's after High School in terms of Christian Education?
- Must choose to join the conversation
- Teach how to care/mentor
- ONA (Open and Affirming)
- More inclusive
- Get youth involved
- Youth and seniors are important
- Caring ministry
- Find out why folks are missing
- Find the hidden needs in the community
- Church without walls – serve through Unleashing Potential (UP), Eden Seminary, International Institute, who knows where else?
- Be more of a missional church
- Come together – see each other as individuals
- The connection between worship and Christian Education is missing
- Cooperative efforts in house
- Involve the community e.g., the Memorial Day service
- Respect the past and learn from it
- Christian mission
- Concerned about getting the younger generation involved
- Activities to draw folks back “home”

- Rethink church today – new “normal”
- Seven small groups around faith formation and fellowship
- Draw in 20's and 30's (mission activities?)
- Community fellowship
- Figure out how the endowments work/fit into our ministry (educate members more on this)