

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Church Health Team held nine focus groups during the month of February. All conversations centered on congregational members' perceptions of passionate spirituality, and how it is demonstrated in church programs and in the personal habits of our members. The discussions were engaging and enlightening, and the CHT wants to thank everyone who participated in the focus groups or pulled one of the team members aside to share their personal perspective.

We are doing a lot of things RIGHT. Here are just a few of the things that were mentioned over and over that are currently in place and that are extraordinarily effective in encouraging passionate spirituality:

- Emmaus
- Small Group Incubator and intentional small groups
- Lenten reading groups
- Reading the Bible and other Christian-based books
- Small groups like the Women's Sunday morning study group, Men's breakfast, Sunday morning Forum, Bible study groups, etc.
- Other church groups that create an opportunity to reflect on God in our midst, e.g. music groups, soup kitchen, retreats, mission trips, furniture bank, prayer shawl, etc.
- Private devotions
- Children's Christian education
- Provision of devotional booklets
- Incorporation of prayer into every church gathering

The Team has organized the information gleaned from the focus groups into a set of themes, which we would like to present to you for your reflection. Our next step will be to determine action steps we will take to address these themes.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFIDENCE

There was much talk about the hesitation to share personal faith habits, for fear that members would appear not to be doing "enough." It was felt that if members had more opportunities to get to know each other on a level deeper than casual conversation, then this would lead to trusting relationships and reliance on one another during our faith journeys. This is the cornerstone for building passionate spirituality.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTENTIONAL SMALL GROUPS

Small groups create avenues by which relationships and trust are built and where Christian discipleship can be practiced in a supportive environment. Luckily, the Small Group Incubator is already established and we are committed to expanding this opportunity to others. In fact, five additional small groups have been "hatched."

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF OUR FAITH

It appears that many members may have difficulty moving from personal expressions of faith to public expressions of faith. For example, many people may feel uncomfortable

with leading a prayer, or praying with others. Another example is difficulty we may have sharing our Christian faith when we reach out to our communities (e.g. soup kitchen, mission trips, etc.) We need to create an environment where all prayers, however simple, are supported and encouraged, and where there is a low-risk atmosphere for people to work on becoming comfortable with public prayer.

Also, there appears to be hesitation to get involved in church leadership, the reason being a self-perceived “inadequate” level of faith. We must acknowledge that the church asks for each person’s involvement, to the extent that his or her talents serve the church. Jesus does not call the equipped; he equips the called! Remember, Jesus chose tax collectors and fishermen as his apostles – not religious leaders of the day.

OPEN COMMUNICATION ABOUT GOD

The congregation appreciates it when someone shares his or her faith story, e.g. an experience on a mission trip, or at the Lenten services on Wednesdays. We should do more of this. We talk about our relationship with God in select small groups, but we need to extend it outside the small groups to our informal conversations.

FAMILIARITY WITH THE BIBLE

The Bible is the first language of our faith. We have opportunities available for Bible study groups, and some members of the congregation read the Bible and/or devotionals at home by themselves or with their spouse. Devotional life and scripture reading will lead to joyful public sharing of our faith. We know we have members who have discovered the joyful reading of devotionals and the Bible, and we would like them to share their experience with others, so that others will also discover the joy that comes from reading the Bible.

THE NEED FOR MULTIPLE “ENTRY POINTS”

People in our congregation come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. Some members were brought up in our church, others were brought up in a Catholic Church, another protestant denomination, or perhaps they were not brought up in a church at all. We need to offer a welcoming environment to all who enter our congregation, understanding that some members may have very little understanding of how a church works, but want to learn, and live a Christian life. It is our responsibility to offer many ways for people to be involved in the life of the church, welcoming all knowledge levels and joyfully offering opportunities to learn how God would like us to live our lives.

CREATE A CULTURE OF MAKING PERSONAL INVITATIONS

In our church, everyone is welcome to participate. All groups are open and welcoming to new participants. All projects welcome new participants. And yet it appears that some people would feel more comfortable getting involved with something new if someone came up to them and said, “I’ve been going to ___ meetings and I am really enjoying it. Why don’t you come to the next meeting? I think you would really like it, too.” Although it is impractical to deliver a personal invitation to everyone to participate in everything, the team recognizes that making the effort to pull in people who may not yet

be involved will spread the church's reach and make more members feel ownership of church activities.

TURNING SUNDAY EARS INTO MONDAY EARS (a memorable phrase from a sermon by Pastor Sean)

There are many members who come to church on Sunday, and then do not think about God's presence in their lives until Sunday comes around again. They listen to God's message only on Sunday! We need to create threads to pull us through the week. If Sunday is spiritually invigorating, we need to find ways to make Monday spiritually invigorating, too! This being said, the team also acknowledges that each member of the congregation has a different set of spiritual needs, and no member should feel less than welcome if they find their spiritual needs fulfilled by only attending services.

IMPROVING INDIVIDUAL PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY INCREASES THE CHURCH'S PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY

We improve the church's passionate spirituality by increasing the passionate spirituality of each church member.

JOY

We need to create more opportunities for members to share the joy of Christ's love. It is infectious - let's spread it.

We hope these findings from the focus groups give you an opportunity to reflect on your own spiritual life, as well as on the opportunities the church provides to support each member of the congregation in his or her spiritual journey. The next step for the Church Health Team is to generate ideas on how to address these findings, and we welcome your input! If you want more information about anything in this document, or if you have ideas on how the congregation can address any of these findings, please contact one of the members of the Team.

In gratitude for the opportunity to serve,

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and the Church Health Team:

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