

Discernment Summary

Although our discernments covered a truly broad range of spiritual (and community) matters, they uncovered a more distilled revelation of who we are, as a Congregation, in relationship to God, to ourselves, and to the world.

Above all, God affirmed to us that we deeply care about these relationships. How did he affirm this to us? How did he help us know that *He is involved with every single one of our important life inflection points or decisions, and that He is active and alive and accessible?*

He affirmed this by giving us the will to gather, in reflective, powerful, joyful but sometimes also uncomfortable, conflicting or confusing encounters, for the purpose of even more closely aligning our individual and congregational lives to his intentions and purposes. He affirmed this, through the work of the Spirit, by bringing us over and over again to a consistent set of revelations and questions that we share as a spiritual family.

He affirmed this most strongly in revealing our often hidden evangelical nature. He is joyfully affirming that he has brought us together as a community to help us try to perfect our expression of our love for Him in order to bring us (individually and as a congregation) and others around us into a closer relationship with Him.

Worship

We heard the hope and concern many times over *that the world would beat a path to our door if they could understand - through worship - who we are, what we do and what we see as a community of God.* We heard that God telling us that *the world would come to us and share our faith if we could somehow communicate with clarity who we are through worship.*

He affirmed the pleasure he takes in our praise of him, in worship, by instilling in us a thirst to *feel excitement and joy in Sunday worship and carrying it to the world during the week*; by reminding us that *worship should be about love and compassion*; by calling us to *“stretch” in our concepts of worship*; by leading us to regard *the scripture and sermon of our weekly worship experience as central to our spiritual growth by offering messages of renewal and affirmation as well as messages that stress our weaknesses*; and, again, with an emphasis on scripture, by telling us to *bring more of Him into our Sunday service through additional focus on the richness, connectedness, complexity and contemporary relevance of Scripture.* We heard that our calling to music as a means for both expressing and experiencing our connection to God is one of the most important ministries of our church and a most effective way of bringing others into our company to hear the word of God.

Service

We heard our evangelical nature revealed in our Congregation’s commitment to Service, as a means of carrying our faith into the world. We are being called *to learn as a Congregation about how our faith informs us about ethics, social justice and current events.* We are being led *to see the outside world as filled with opportunities to serve our Faith and to use our gifts to help shape the community around us.* He has also asked us to *remember Him and use Him in the actions we take and the gifts we provide to the world at large.* Our call to service to others is a call to serve Him – and that makes us a Church rather than a “club”.

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Spiritual Growth

He revealed that we value ministering to each other as a form of evangelism, helping each other create a church that is a *crucible for the safe exploration of new paths of spiritual growth, no matter where we are on our own faith journeys*. He reminds us that *the spiritual roots of our Congregation can inform our faith today*. He trusts us to *take our own future in our hands as an active laity, leading us to become disciples of Jesus*. He challenges us to *embrace a diversity of theological views simultaneously with validating as a Congregation a core set of beliefs*, in the revealed knowledge that our *diversity of belief helps us in our individual spiritual journeys*. However, he makes us *struggle with completely trusting a Trinitarian theology, whether "liberal" or "conservative"*, and recognizes *there is anxiety that too much a diversity of views would lead to a confusing view of our core theology*. At the bottom of all our questioning, however, is the faith that *He is calling us to use his Word in a bible-based path to spiritual growth, that the power of prayer is connected to our core theological values, and God is involved as an active presence in our lives and is a foundation we can always turn to*.

Small Group Ministries

God has called our congregation together as a lattice of dynamic small groups in order to further perfect our relationship with God – and to call others into relationship with God - through worship, service and spiritual growth. He is constantly affirming to us *that one-to-one contact with each other is extraordinarily powerful*. He makes us *thirst for inclusiveness and mentoring relationships, one on one or in small groups*. He showed us that *our strength as a Congregation is not through ritual but through relationships* and called us to recognize that *we should engage in multigenerational (youth, young family, elder) acts of faith and worship*. He is constantly reminding us that *children and youth "get it" when it comes to connecting life with faith and asking the tough questions that result*. He reminds us that *we have a strong Congregational commitment to the faith development of our children and youth*. And, again, as an evangelical congregation, we know that *we should use youth activities to bring families into our faith community*.

Hospitality

He revealed to us that our *call is to make our church healthy, through love, compassion and hospitality* but that *to better serve the world and each other, we need to be more friendly*. Although (or because) *our church family is true family, and a family that supports all of our life changes, including death and dying*, there is a recognition that *many times we can be negative and unconstructive and need to be compassionate*. God continues to tell us that we need to *be hospitable and welcoming when we are often unwelcoming - or appear to be unwelcoming - in practice*.

Summary

In sum, he is *asking us to bring His word to the world by combining a powerful, reflective large group worship experience with the complementary dynamic activity of our small group ministries, to perform service in His name and to support each other's growth in faith and spirit, all with an attitude of joyful hospitality*.

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