



# REPORT TO YOUR CHURCH ABOUT ITS INTERVIEWS ON CONGREGATIONAL MISSION AND MINISTRY

from  
The Congregational Discovery Reading Team  
Church Innovations Institute

## ***How to Use this Report***

This report gives the major findings of a self-study by members of the congregation about the character of worship, education, and general involvement of members, as well as the congregation's responses to community and congregational changes. It is based on 24 interviews, gathered in winter 2014 by several members of the congregation.

### **Board of Directors**

The Rt. Rev. Mark  
MacDonald

Bishop Callon Holloway

The Rev. Bruce Modahl

The Rev. Dr. Patrick  
Keifert

Marie Failingner

Gordon R. Engstrom

The Rev. Wesley  
Granberg-Michaelson

The Rev. John  
Strommen

Linda Bergquist

The Rev. Kathryn Brown

The Rev. Jeanne Radak

Dr. Alan Walter

Dr. Robert Kolb

We believe these findings should be taken seriously even though they are based on information from a moderate number of interviews. Leaders should consider their own reflections and use common sense about the issues raised in this report, building on the strengths of Your Church while addressing problem areas as opportunities for further growth as a congregation.

We believe that both the interviewers and those with whom they talked have the best interests of Your Church at heart and gave information they hope will help the congregation.

**Our recommendations are meant as questions, not to tell the congregation what to do.** We believe that your congregation's continuing work in faithful conversations will help it address some of the opportunities discovered in these interviews. We also believe the congregation's leadership has the wisdom and ability to best address its own situation.

All of the people who took time to answer these interview questions, and most certainly the Listening Leaders who did so many splendid interviews, should be commended for their willingness to think seriously about your congregation's members' past and present experiences of worship, learning, change, and mission. Such careful and helpful work will be of dramatic value as we all consider what God is up to in the community and what God is calling Your Church to do here. As we seek to build on strengths, we remember that God equips us for every good work and that we lead by the grace of God's gifts to us.

**1. Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation.**

24 interviews, 63 remarks

(the number after a response indicates how many people mentioned it)

family-like caring for one another – 11

prayer – 8 (God helps us through prayer – 1)

men's & women's Bible studies – 5 (God connects men to worship/church through Bible study – 1)

congregation reaches out to the community – 5

Kids' Shoppe is growing – 4

the gift to buy the land – 3

friendliness – 3

communion open to everyone – 2

fundraising and other support to people with problems – 2

the pastor's activities – 2

sermons are awesome, reach us – 2

community concerts – 2

**mentioned once each (14):** God is guiding us step-by-step, God works through all people to keep things running smoothly, God connects people, choir – all participate, praise hymns – everyone active and enjoying it, prayer shawls, VBS, people visiting us, prayer chain, older members mentoring younger members in the faith, we are Christian (not just nice) doing God's work, pastors healing service, trying different ways to meet younger people outside the church, a retreat group of gay men were welcomed here – they were moved by this one.

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. Your Church surely demonstrates caring for one another. Your members feel part of a family of believers. Christian kinship abounds. How have you learned to step outside your individual selves and help one another in times of need? What motivates you to give of your time and energy to be so supportive of one another? How might this motivation expand in new ways to your neighbors, both old and new? How might your church, as a community, step outside itself and give away itself on behalf of those who need the faith that you have?
2. God appears to you in prayer. This is something even your young members pick up on as a characteristic of your church. This is a good thing to be known for, both outside and inside your faith community. What might be the relationship between your focus on prayer and your caring for one another?

## ***2. Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.***

24 interviews, 37 remarks

times of struggle, death – 6 (support during health scare – 2, pastor’s hospital visits, funeral support, funeral of former pastor, worship service after death of 2 parents)

amid caring, like-believing people – 6 (caring people around me at confirmation, at MLK's church they showed they love the Lord, when a member went into hospice we acknowledged the little things she had done and the congregation was at peace, healing service, feel belonging and pride with others who share the faith, at Synod assembly)

music – 5 (Holden setting sounds like angels, Christmas songs, Lenten hymns, St. Olaf festival, camp with the singing Bible service)

sermons that touch or speak right to me – 4

prayer – 2 (as I was praying over people, the Holy Spirit was giving me the words; during prayer when the answer comes before I ask the question)

**mentioned once each (14):** “Growing in God's Field” with Bishop Hanson, Concordia Annual Business Assembly, video about telling the gospel story, caring people, when the retreat group thought up “Light in the Beartooths,” the process of buying land, when hearing that it's easy to be a Christian when everyone agrees with you... but in adversity?, decision to move here and be married, under the cross on the land in all weather, seeing how the Lord has helped me, when I assist at communion, God watched over me when I was in the military and I'm grateful, at camp when I knew I wanted to be a Christian, as a Sunday school teacher.

### ***recommended questions to consider:***

1. In addition to times people have experienced profound worship *at your church*, during communion, during your land purchase, and so on, many people mention experiences that have happened *outside your church*. Look at all of them! It’s good that your people can see profoundly worshipful moments not only in a worship service but also outside in the world. People confess that they’ve experienced profound worship while meeting a future spouse, at a leadership conference, and so on. How did your people get the skill to articulate when God has moved them? Not everybody can do that. It is truly a spiritual gift. It lets you recognize God at work in profound ways both inside the church building and outside in the community. How can you nurture this gift among your members and teach it to those who come to you?
2. At times of suffering and death, people are supported at Your Church. You have the gift of surrounding people during their times of trial. How might this gift be put to use among old and new neighbors in your town who may be without support?

**3. Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and others were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.** 24 interviews, 62 remarks

None/can't recall any – 9

**How people fight (33)**

discussions here are open for people to take part – 10

with respect – 5

people leave – 4

passionate discussions – 2

**mentioned once each (12):** pastor did not solve/address the problem, being judgmental, not sure things get resolved, secrets are a bad thing, using longevity as power, things are forgiven but not forgotten, non-confrontational, majority's opinion rules, disagreeing parties asked to meet which was uncomfortable, getting caught up in the fights of others, keep disagreements out of worship and coffee time, discussions allow for looking at things differently in the future.

**What they fight about (20)**

new church land – 3

no changing – 3

finances – 2

putting church up for sale – 2

**mentioned once each (10):** cleaning out a bookshelf, older members objected to changing the carpet and throwing out moldy hymnals, certain items in Kids' Shoppe, baptism of a non-member's child, parent verbally attacked a teacher for treating a child unfairly, hard to express helpful information if it is unpopular to hear, stress, new versus old, biblical literalism, material things but not creed or doctrine.

***recommended questions to consider***

1. We have rarely read a set of interviews **with** better more fruitful fighting habits than yours – that is, you have impassioned discussions that bear fruit, and when feelings are hurt, they're attended to, for the most part. Who taught you to do this? Many churches don't. What is the role of church leadership, both lay and staff, in learning and then keeping up this good habit?
2. The building and the land are clearly at the center of your discernment; here and in other questions this subject arises again and again. You will no doubt be making a lot of decisions as you move forward, owning both your current building and the new land. What processes do you have in place for listening well to your members, to your neighbors, and to God's call to you, for God's preferred and promised future for Your Church? How will you teach and model those processes to everyone who needs to be part of those conversations?

***4. Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation.  
Tell a memory that gives you hope.***

24 interviews, 65 remarks

**Anxiety sources (35)**

aging, not appealing to young people – 7

finances – 5

lower membership, dying off – 5

church building/location – 3 (what if we don't get a new church?, selling/renting the funeral home, taking so long to sell the church)

no more Sunday school – 2

no anxieties – 2

**mentioned once each (11):** we're too small, how to connect new people in, former employer's behavior at work versus at church made us leave, strained relationships, uncomfortable discussion at meetings, perceptions that Lutherans are older and well-off, intimidating stewardship drive, when conflicts of opinion arise, pastor's future retirement, could outgrow our space, when someone said we can do this congregational self-study on our own – we can't.

**Hope sources (30)**

enthusiasm & commitment to purchase property – 4

things progressing with the new church – 3

this interview/study process shows we're trying to figure it out – 2

Kids' Shoppe grown to the whole community – 2

**mentioned once each (19):** we are not stagnant, counsel more open, church involved in community, everyone pitches in, my grandson likes this church, helpfulness of certain folks when we arrived here, we're moving ahead and staying true our roots, faith overcomes issues, new people moving into Your town, students staying connected after they graduate, VBS draws young people in, put faith in God to guide us in the right direction, higher attendance in January, when Christmas service was packed, buy-in for projects and fundraisers, cookie ministry, mortgage burning ceremony, this congregational survey will say what the congregation wants, new church will bring growth and younger members.

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. Many of your members build their hopes upon the possibility of attracting many young people and young families to Your Church. One person says you need to figure out how to attract younger people so they will start coming to church, and then says you need to help these younger people understand what Christ looks like in their lives today. This person has highlighted two key reasons churches look for young new members: so that there will be more people in church to take part in the worship and work, and so that more people experience the presence of Christ in their lives. Which reason is paramount for Your Church's members? Which is paramount for those outside of Your Church? How do you see Your Church engaging both of these reasons as they reach out to the community?
2. In what ways are you prepared to learn from the young people in your town? How might they teach you, Your Church's members, about how God is at work in your lives today?

***5. If you were to leave this congregation for five years, without any contact, what would you expect to see when you returned? What would you hope to see?***      24 interviews, 104 remarks

**Expect to see (48)**

graying, aging – 6  
many will be gone, have died – 6  
no changes – 5  
same people – 5  
maybe change of pastor – 4  
new people – 4  
progress on building project – 4  
continued community service – 3  
same caring – 3  
different setting/location – 2

**mentioned once each (6):** financially viable, different people in leadership, more young families, both traditional and nontraditional liturgies, relationships between people of faith, same size.

**Hope to see (56)**

found ways to engage younger families – 7  
larger community impact – 7  
new location – 6  
new building – 5  
younger – 5  
bigger – 5  
not in shambles or collapsed – 2  
same support and concern – 2

**mentioned once each (17): hopes for sameness – 6:** same size, alive and excited as it is now, welcoming, hope new people have the same ambitions as present members, old familiar faces, community events hosted (concerts); **hopes for changes – 11:** more people from other denominations, growing interest in church involvement, new pastor, new faces, change, diverse membership, vibrant, updated music, not boring, more mission driven, more deer and turkeys in the yard.

***recommended questions to consider***

1. Expectations are about remaining the same, largely. Hopes are mostly about being different. What do you think that means? It may mean that you do not yet know how to get to your hopes from your current state. Yet you have something many churches lack: a new land with possibilities and an openness to reach out continually into the community of Your town. Why do you think people didn't imagine more about the land and the new potential church in response to this question? How might your members get the opportunity to do that?
2. How might you try listening in your community, and, from what you hear, build some concrete hopes for your future? How might you place your current gifts in the service of the people you hope to connect with after listening to them?

**6. Describe this congregation to someone new and tell how they would be nurtured here.**

24 interviews, 94 remarks

**Descriptions (80)**

welcoming – 10  
elderly – 9  
friendly – 8  
caring – 5  
accepting – 5  
people involved in community through their relationships – 5  
traditional Lutherans – 4  
good pastor – 3  
small – 3  
people look out for each other – 2  
prayer support – 2  
men's and women's groups – 2  
not judged if not here every week – 2  
open for discussion – 2  
open to new things – 2  
sincere – 2  
vibrant – 2

**mentioned once each (12):** lots of activities, Kids' Shoppe, musical, good sermons, in search of mission, adult forms informative, Fun and Fellowship, music on the land, we ask who needs help, best group of aunts and uncles anywhere, older folks could nurture new Your town families, dying.

**Ways of being nurtured (14)**

we are proactive in getting to know one another – 3

**mentioned once each (11):** receptive to new people so it's easy to come in, push folks to grow, draws you in, people are nurturing and involved, no one gets left out, people are personally concerned about you here, worship, caring for church, diversity of thinking, invitations to participate in community opportunities, older people are nurtured here but we don't know how to nurture younger people.

***recommended questions to consider***

1. This question is Your Church's brochure. It's how you would describe your congregation to someone who's never attended. Does the listing about seem about right? Your members see you as welcoming and supportive. Clearly you do support one another – we have heard this in other questions very specifically. How does that support extend outward to the greater community? How do you use your current relationships with non-members to deliver the support you are famous for? How do you use your building? Your land?

2. Several people mention your prayer shawl ministry here and elsewhere in the questions. Might you use the prayer shawl as a metaphor for Your Church's presence in Your town? Perhaps you are a shawl that comforts, you are a prayer to be worn, you are a tapestry, woven from many strands in Your town with a purpose the in the community?

## **7. What tells you God is present here in worship?**

24 interviews, 64 remarks

lively singing – 9  
great sermons – 8  
genuineness of spirit – 5  
emphasis on service – 4  
joy and fulfillment during and after worship – 4  
acceptance of each other – 4  
open communion – 2  
traditional liturgy – 2  
outgoing congregation – 2  
when church helps people having a hard time – 2  
coming together to help someone – 2  
warmth in sharing the peace – 2  
paid off mortgage on land – 2

**mentioned once each (16):** everything, friends and family who come, kids in church are flourishing, prayer chain, Kids' Shoppe, when people from other denominations come and stay, steady attendance, people bring kids, pastor Kim led by the Spirit, aha moments, God is in our home and thoughts, in congregational activities, Sunday forums, I feel a relationship with God and others, looking for God's guidance for our future, feeling of hope.

### ***recommended questions to consider:?***

1. This question allowed your reading team to see more details of Your Church's worship life. Here we see the importance of your being together to be "taken up" in worship, to sing together robustly, to hear a sermon together. There seemed to us to be a big WE in worship, that you are a *community* in worship. This is exceedingly strong, and it's a real asset. The down side of this strong reality is to consider what someone who is not a part of your group feels when they attend a worship service. Are newcomers or visitors left out of that community experience? How would you know? How might you find out?
2. Singing, music is very revealing of God's presence for your members. How do you account for this importance? How did you get this way? Did someone lead you to participate in worship, to sing together in this way? What makes your music so corporate, so unifying? Do you also use these gifts to make a unit of the folks who come to your concerts on the land?

**8. Tell about how you and others feel about the changes in this congregation and in the community of Your town in the past 3-5 years.**

*24 interviews, 108 remarks*

**Changes in the congregation (53)**

**Positive (35):** many good changes – 3

putting ourselves out there in more ways – 7

Kids' Shoppe successful – 4

good and hopeful to get a new church – 2

use of our land and community concerts – 2

more volunteering opportunities – 2

more openness to differing views, new things – 2

**mentioned once each (13):** better exposure, with the new church we can really expand our programs, welcoming of those unlike us, more activities, improved choir, improved newsletter, somewhat larger, good sermons, stewardship up because we want to invest in our future, showing growth, more God-centered, fantastic to be pointing ourselves outward and not be a closed community, this interview process is priceless in really hearing one another.

**Neutral or negative (18):** we're staying the same – 4

very slow change, could become stagnant – 2

low attendance – 2

**mentioned once each (10):** disappointing to go from two services to one, some people stay in spite of their newcomers, loss of people to death, no recruiting, wonder about the changes since we bought the land, I miss the cottage meetings, I don't mind being older (we don't need the babies), with our open communion I wish people realized its significance, the land issue has divided us but we are working through it well, aging with no new young people.

**Changes in the community of Your town (55)**

growing – 10 (seen as both positive and negative)

**Positive (17):** new building and remodeling, especially the hospital – 6

the community is tackling tough issues like poverty – 3

better technology – 2

**mentioned once each (6):** new people will be looking for new church, Bakken oil people coming, people looking for safe place for families, remarkable movement, more volunteer opportunities, diverse newcomers make change easier.

**Neutral or negative (28):** change is difficult – 3

younger people attend church less – 3

new people want to turn Your town into what they had where they came from – 3

Your town is not a place for young families because it's too costly – 3

becoming more a retirement community – 3

many startup churches draw people away from old congregations – 2

staying the same – 2

**mentioned once each (9)** – possible road through our property, kids drifting to crime, more people need help, politically stagnant, concerned about the motorcycle rally – could we keep people outdoors?, becoming an unchurched town, Your town Mountain is no longer free for people over 70, Festival of Nations spotlighted our diversity which some people didn't like, don't know enough to comment.

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. In these responses we hear some fears about changes in Your town, some of which were articulated almost identically to one another, such as “people moving into town want to make Your town just like where they came from.” Since this phrasing comes up more than once and repeats almost word for word, we wonder whether this is a fear that comes up repeatedly at Your Church, or perhaps comes up more widely across Your town. We also wonder how strongly, for a church that regularly extends itself into and connects with its community, this above-mentioned fear may keep you at arm’s length from those who are moving to your town. How might Your Church grow along with a changing Your town? If Your town is changing as time passes, how will Your Church continue to discover God’s mission in Your town and discern how to be part of it, whatever shape Your town takes?
2. Diversity of your changing community might come to be reflected in your membership. What will that mean to Your Church? Diversity can include an infusion of young people, working class people, single adults, and of course the young families you seek. But several people here say that Your town is expensive to live in, too expensive for the young families you wish for as future members. Might the issue of affordable housing become a way to connect with your new neighbors and with others more widely in the community? What would it mean if Your Church were made up of different groups than the ones who founded it? Is there anything in Your Church’s past that can help you claim your future?
3. Look at the positive perceptions of the changes in Your Church. You have a highly caring, profoundly worshipping congregation who has been uniquely equipped to give of yourselves to one another and to others. Your Kids’ Shoppe is a great example of a ministry where you use your own strengths and creativity to make a real difference with children and their families. How else can you use your very own strengths to live out Christ’s love to other folks – to retirees, even – to be good at deploying what you’ve been given to others even in your same age bracket?
4. Who is Your town? Who can best teach you who Your town is becoming? How will you look for God’s work already begun in town? How will your unique gifts be useable in God’s mission there?