

November 4, 2017 Retreat Summary

This document is a compilation of comments from the retreat. It includes:

1. Description of the main retreat activity (p. 1)
2. General observations about the retreat (pp. 1-2)
3. Comments made during the 'walk around' (pp. 2-4)
4. Proposed next steps (p. 4)
5. Summaries of conversations from each of the 8 areas of ministry (pp. 4-17)

1. Description of the main retreat activity

Under the direction of our facilitator Rev. Jennifer Kottler, participants were invited to join in conversations about any (or all) of the following 8 areas of ministry:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Adult education and fellowship | 5. Local and global mission |
| 2. Children and youth ministry | 6. Membership and evangelism |
| 3. Congregational care | 7. Property |
| 4. Finance and administration | 8. Worship |

Each area of ministry had its own table with lists of activities we do in that area of ministry and each table's discussion was facilitated by a member of the retreat organizing committee (with help from a few other folks too). People were invited to add activities, comment on which activities we do well, which need improvement (and what it might take to accomplish that), and to discuss how we might better organize these activities.

Once individual table conversations had ended, we all joined together to take a 'walk around' of all the tables and to hear a summary from the facilitator.

The event opened and closed with worship services led by Rev. Kottler.

2. General observations:

- About 50 people attended.
- Participants were passionate about the ministries of our church, adding in more activities our committee had not included, and making lots of suggestions for ways to improve our ministries.
- Many participants mentioned that they learned a lot from the retreat: they weren't aware of all of our church's activities.
- All ministry groups commented on the need to figure out ways to engage more people in their activities.
- The activities of a few areas of ministry are quite clearly delineated and fall in line with the current responsibilities of one or more session committees.
- The responsibilities and activities of other areas (congregational care, membership and evangelism, adult education and fellowship, local and global mission) are currently carried out by multiple groups within the church.
- Some areas of ministry benefit from having staff with specific responsibilities in that area.
- No group proposed eliminating any current activities.

- Multiple groups asked if committees could be chaired by non-session members.
- More than one group wondered if we're suffering from "giving fatigue" because of the frequency with which we ask people to contribute money (e.g., annual pledge, capital campaigns, multiple special offerings, OGHS, 2-cents-a-meal).

3. "Walk-around" comments made by facilitators

Adult Education and Fellowship (volunteer facilitators: Judith McKinney, Ellen Reynolds, Jennifer Morris)

Adult Education is not going as well as Fellowship

Passages works well

Winter weekend at Vanderkamp is a favorite; but we need new site or just go for the day

Not many people are aware of the Sunday morning issues table

Recommendations:

Blend education and fellowship together

Increase connections between adult education classes and mission (committee) activities

Revive small fellowship groups

Invite older high school students to join the adult Sunday morning class

Children & Youth (Chris Gerling, facilitator)

The program provides a strong foundation for children growing up in the church.

Kathy Breese is responsible for much of this.

Comments, suggestions and questions:

We like the new curriculum for middle school age kids.

How do we get more kids involved?

One good sign: our 2 youngest classes are really big.

How do we engage youth after they've been confirmed? We haven't been very successful in this.

Try informal and frequent meetings for these youths. Consider inviting them to adult ed classes.

Need to involve parents in more informal ways.

We need to communicate with parents like teachers and coaches do – using Facebook, other electronic means.

Congregational Care (Lisa Gage, facilitator)

Most frequent comment: we need a central place, an "Opportunity Wall," where people could sign up to help with congregational care activities so Deacons don't have to do all the work. This would also encourage more people to become involved in church activities.

Need more people to help provide transportation for church members.

Finance & Administration (Gary Harman, facilitator)

Used to focus more on increasing the endowment, but in recent times there's been competition with capital campaigns and other requests for funds.

We need to prioritize.

The group wondered if we're suffering from giving fatigue.

Local and Global Mission (Donna Newcomb, facilitator)

We are engaged in many mission projects, and many different groups within the church are making decisions about what projects to support and how (e.g., PW, church school, SERRV, Deacons, Mission & Social Concerns Committee, I&S)

At the moment, more of our mission activity is in the form of financial support to local and global mission projects. We have fewer hands-on projects.

Are we doing too many different things?

Are we having an impact?

Are people getting tired of being asked for money?

Recommendations:

We should do an assessment of which church committees and groups are contributing to which mission projects. We should coordinate, and figure out which projects are having the most impact.

We should look into coordinating with people from other churches to have an even bigger impact.

We need to do a better job of educating our church members/friends about the mission work we're doing or supporting. Many people aren't familiar with all the projects we support.

Some projects are very time-consuming (e.g., Café Justo), but could probably be simplified.

Need continuity in the work of endorsing community group grants to Presbytery. This can be lacking when there's a transition in committee leadership.

Membership & Evangelism (Jackie Augustine, facilitator)

Activities focus on Recruitment and Retention

Communication is critical

Recommendations:

Host non-worship events at church (e.g., as part of Geneva Night Out) to bring people into church

Have our music groups participate in community events

Need to make sure people are staying connected, whether their primary mode of communication is electronic or not. That's a big divide, and it makes communication more challenging.

Property (Walt Gage, facilitator, with help from John Hovey)

One issue is the large number of building keys that are out in circulation.

Property committee is in the process of evaluating building use fees

Planning to replace all incandescent light bulbs with LEDs

Worship (Virginia Champlin, facilitator)

Many activities are going very well (e.g., acolyte program, communion)

People had both very specific and broader suggestions and questions about worship

Broader:

Should we continue to have 2 Sunday morning services?

Include multimedia in worship

Include more types of music during worship (guitar, percussion, etc.)

Record the service to be broadcast or otherwise shared with people unable to be there in person

We need to recruit more people to help prepare communion, deal with flowers (work of the Chancel Guild) since most members are now in their 70's or older.

Specific:

Need to improve training and assistance for lay readers and folks giving the children's message

People should listen to the music rather than talking during the prelude and postlude

Continue to offer healing services

4. Proposed next steps

1. We'll write a short article on the retreat for the December newsletter.
2. Committee chairs and moderators of other church groups should discuss the retreat comments with their groups.
3. The retreat committee will meet with Jennifer Kottler to get her perspectives on:
 - How the retreat went
 - What our discussions tell her about where our church is and where we might/should be heading.
 - Recommendations for next steps
 - Examples of how other churches organize themselves – and whether any of these models might be good for us
 - Holding a joint session/deacons gathering in January to discuss specifics of changes proposed for church organization
4. The retreat committee plans to generate proposals for reorganization that could be discussed in January.

5. Summaries of conversations from each of the 8 areas of ministry

Adult Education and Fellowship Discussion

(facilitated by Ellen Reynolds, Judith McKinney, Jennifer Morris, Ann Warner)

Activities:

Education activities

Sunday morning adult classes

Book studies

Passages

Sunday morning news and issues table

“Let’s Talk”

PW Bible studies

Lenten soup-supper studies

Church library development and care

Fellowship activities

Strawberry Festival

VanderKamp winter weekend

Church talent show

Soup and a song spring luncheon
PW Knitting circles

What's going very well:

Fellowship events, Passages, Let's Talk summer events (better attendance when in homes)

Not so well:

Sunday morning adult education classes (low attendance)

Sunday morning news and issues table (discussion of what the church's response should be to current events) (need to explain and promote)

Recommendations:

General recommendation:

Inject more adult education into fellowship and more fellowship into adult education

Sunday morning activities

- More connection between Adult Ed and Mission (to connect study to action)
Examples: Family Promise, Community Center, Community Lunch
Pass on ideas from adult classes to Mission committee
- Concurrent Sunday morning adult education programs need to be carefully planned so as not to compete for same audience
- Be more open to different viewpoints, more welcoming of those who don't share general perspective
- Invite older high-school students to participate in Sunday morning classes with adults (eliminate HS Sunday School?)
- Promote and explain Sunday morning news & issues table to encourage more engagement

Other activities

- Bible study
One Bible book at a time (Kerygma)
Topic-based
2-year structured curriculum
- Have more book studies
Schedule some for evenings
Schedule some at start of business meetings (20 min)
"Congregational Read" with only one discussion at the end (with a meal!)
- Consider offering "Let's Talk" after church, with a meal
- Vanderkamp no longer available for overnight stays so need to explore other locations or day trips.
- Consider summer weekend of outdoor activities

Comments:

- PW Bible studies – scheduling is a challenge

- PW knitting circles – ongoing, but fewer participants
- Lenten soup-suppers – hard to hear for some people; very valuable to attendees
- Church library collection is going to be weeded, then scanned into an online catalogue

Questions:

- How should we coordinate fellowship activities?
- When new ideas for events arise, who says yea or nay, who organizes and how?

Suggestions for new activities:

- Hymn sing with dish-to-pass meal
- Small group fellowship (revive octets under a different name and number; social gatherings)
- Summer outdoor activity day or weekend

Additional adult education and fellowship comments from table discussion:

- Need to address how we can be “good Christians” in this current political climate. We need to have civil conversations among ourselves from various viewpoints.
- Evenings: hold fewer and shorter committee meetings and offer more opportunities for fellowship and study
- Audibility in parlors and fellowship hall: need microphones! Inability to hear keeps some from participating in Adult Ed and Lenten suppers
- Need to work on recruiting more facilitators/teachers for education sessions
- Return to a paid coordinator of adult education
- Committee is burning out; need someone to recruit more attendees to lead discussions/programs

Comments about other things:

- The “Welcome” that appears in our bulletin – is it part of our formal policy? Isn’t our Vision and Mission Statement enough?
- Have a sign-up sheet for coffee hour service so anyone can sign up.

Children and Youth Ministry (Chris Gerling, facilitator)

Why did you come to this table?

Have served on the committee, and have children

This is the future of church

Not many people are in here

Have taught Sunday School for a long time

We need to encourage the children we have and bring more families in

Sunday School has always been an important part of my life and my kids and grandkids- and I think it's one of the most important things the church does

Strengths of our CE/ Youth program

We have a very strong SS program; Kathy is very organized and does a phenomenal job

Other churches treat it as daycare to occupy kids during service

We have a commitment to our children and Christian Education

It makes a big difference for the kids, even if they don't show it.

We should be proud of ourselves that the congregation has allowed children to be such a large part of worship in all phases.

The church used to be "kids should be seen and not heard."

Kids in our church are elders, deacons, lay readers, ushers.

How do we get more young families to attend worship?

It's a societal thing. Families aren't going.

We should encourage kids to attend worship.

Speakers in the narthex have helped.

How do we keep a focus on growing youth involvement even though membership is declining?

Younger kids classes are starting to grow again.

One way to keep older kids in the loop is youth group.

We still have to offer older kids a space of their own.

Older youth drift away after confirmation.

Real challenge, Bill Lamb has tried lots of programs.

Is there another way to engage older youth?

A more informal/ regular meeting?

It used to be every week, not necessarily going places.

Maybe we could have activities with different leaders.

There were Hobart students who came in previously.

Go sledding, play football, have a person come talk about their job.

Are we open to having families come? We've always done that.

Youth fellowship- if we meet once a month, and a kid misses it, they may not see the other kids for a month.

Very hard to get kids to come after confirmation class

How do you target different personalities? How do you harness what the kids will do if it's not talking?

Should we combine adult ed and Christian Ed?

It seems like the planning would always be wasting a person's time.

Can we use task forces vs. committees to do some of these tasks?

How do we formalize these "task forces" without scaring people who are scared of committees?

Some jobs are cyclical and have times with more or less commitment.

Church newsletter ads to see if there is interest in a task (e.g., pancake dinner), put it in the bulletin a few Sundays, put it on the website- just looking for help.

Time to contact people is each Sunday, so events come fast

Time & Talents sheet could include events

How do most sign-ups happen? Electronic, bulletins, newsletters

We can engage more people and get more people involved without pulling them into committees

Break things into small enough "chunks" so people can be engaged without being overwhelmed

We need to make more use of the time & talents sheet information. We need to use this information and contact people with it.

Can we make people feel comfortable finding their own level of involvement

Good ways to connect with children/ families

Sundays when the kids sing are good times to advertise to children

Put info on the bottom of the coloring sheets so the kids will be more likely to bring them home

Use the Remind.app to contact Sunday School, children's choirs, youth group with information & activities

Put Paula on Remind for youth group

Is there a way to connect with HWS kids? As SS teachers or informal youth group coordinators?

This year we're sending postcards to every kid on his/ her birthday

Every kid who has been baptized gets cradle roll mailings and then when they turn 3, we send a letter about Sunday School

Always excited by what we do

Challenge to bring in more kids

Camp Whitman and other youth-oriented mission

Camp Whitman is being re-energized

We sent 4 this year. There have been more and less.

Can committees be a vehicle to educate people about the church

Is Whitman available in the off-season? Yes, in the spring and fall.

Mission feels like Heifer Project should be a children & youth task- we agree

The church is raising \$30-40K for "extra" offerings and initiatives. We need to be sensitive to people being constantly asked

Recognizing those who work hard behind the scenes

How can we “recognize” all of the people who do all of those small jobs in the church (Ti Siebert, Joan McClure, etc.)

Could we recognize everyone at a Sunday service (then we wouldn’t forget anyone)?

Show the kids and others just how many people are involved.

Opportunities for collaboration with other retreat groups

Congregational Care- Opportunity wall

Membership & Evangelism- Informal church activities

Adult/ continuing Ed- Older youth invited to adult ed

Congregational Care

Notes from table discussion facilitated by Lisa Gage

Activities:

Care of members with special needs

- Visiting shut-ins and elderly members
- Putting together Christmas bags for shut-ins
- Parish Nurse visits
- Coordinating and providing transportation for those who can't drive.
- Weekend hospital visitations
- Sending cards and comforting those in need
- Twilight group (caregivers support group)
- Assisting Pastor Deb with communion services at Seneca Lake Terrace and Living Center North
- Use of Pastor's discretionary funds to help members in financial distress

Care of the congregation in general

- Receptions for memorial services
- Coordinating hosts for coffee hour
- Baccalaureate brunch
- Organizing and hosting fellowship events: supper and song, harvest dinner, talent show (belong here or in Adult Ed and Fellowship?)
- Welcoming visitors (membership and evangelism?)
- Coordinating ushers for all services (does this belong with worship or with membership and evangelism?)

Suggestions:

- Encourage more people to volunteer to help with these activities by having an "Opportunity Wall" of sign-up sheets in Fellowship Hall
- Assisting with communion services should be opened up to non-Deacons
- Provide transportation to appointments as well as to church events
- What about using a bus to transport people to church?
- Facilitate connections to the Office For the Aging so members can get the services they need
- Have a general sign-up list for coffee hour hosts – don't assign committees
- Assign a deacon to each family in the church
- Have a welcome kiosk with pamphlets and other info on the church
- Make the Joys of January an annual event

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION SUMMARY FROM RETREAT (Gary Harman, facilitator)

To prepare for the meeting I prepared categories and subcategories for activities. What I prepared in the black, suggested additions at the retreat are in red.

Category 1. STEWARDSHIP AND SPECIAL GIVING

Subcategories

Stewardship campaign

Responsibility for Pledge Sunday Harvest Dinner from Deacons?

One Great Hour of Sharing auction

Move to Mission?

Foundations and memorial giving (bequests)

Focus more on bequests to enhance endowments?

Special giving such as MLK, Advent, Peace, etc.

Some are PW events

Should we limit special giving (see comments on "giving fatigue" later in this document?)

Events for Pastor's Discretionary fund moved from Deacons?

Capital campaigns

See giving fatigue comments later.

Category 2. Personnel

Subcategories

Recommendations to Session for staff salary adjustments

Recommendations to Session for clergy compensation adjustments and calls

Personnel performance evaluations and position descriptions for nonclergy employees

Category 3. Finance

Subcategories

Recommend annual budgets to Session

Review financial documents from financial administration

Audits as needed

Investments and management of endowments

Category 4. Nominations for Deacons and Session.

Category 5. Columbarium development and management

Category 6. Church history

Special concerns expressed

Endowment stability

1. The endowment is slowly diminishing and used for operating expenses, a little like each of us spending our retirement funds for daily costs prior to retirement.
2. We use over \$160K annually for operating expenses. Some of this comes from interest but the principal is also invaded each year.

3. Increases in the endowment from gifts and bequests are less than that removed.
4. Do we, as did several years ago, make a special emphasis on bequests and memorial giving—perhaps a special task force?

Giving fatigue?

1. One reason the special emphasis on endowments was minimized is because of competition with special offerings and capital campaigns
2. We have special offering on at least a monthly basis.
3. Do we know what all of these do, and do we coordinate between groups? Is there a lack of communication/education with the congregation?
4. Do special offerings/capital campaigns have a negative effect on general stewardship offering?
5. One important fact—when the two churches merged there was a total of about 1450 members. Now there are 528 and many are retired and on fixed income.
6. Are we asking too much of the congregational giving capacity?
7. The same argument can be made for the time and energy pool of the congregants.
8. We have been noncritical in our evaluations of giving and special offerings. The attitude has been that if it is a good idea, we should do whatever is useful. Is it time to take a more critical view of giving priorities??

Notes from Local and Global Mission
(Donna Newcomb, facilitator)

Discussion was very fruitful. It always came back around to the fact that we need to be better educators of all we do. Not everyone has been here forever. We should know more about all the missions we support so we know if we are making an impact with our contributions (e.g., 2 cents a meal and Heifer).

People wondered if we are spreading ourselves too thin within the church – with small contributions to lots of different mission projects – so that our contributions is not really felt. On the other side of things perhaps all we do is really appreciated and felt.

Another concern was the turnover of chairpersons causes lapse in knowledge thus things like grants for local organizations are lost due to incomplete applications or deadlines not being met. Should there be a person(s) who works with finance to ensure this does not happen? Does the chair of all session committees have to be a Session member?

Mission projects we support with money (not complete):

- Special Offerings (Birthday, Blanket and Tools, Peacemaking, Thank, Martin Luther King Scholarship)
- Heifer (should it fall under Children and Youth Ministry?)
- Presbytery projects: Camp Whitman, 2-cents-a-meal
- OGHS

Mission projects we support with Time and Talent (many we also support with \$\$):

- OGHS auction (time and talent involved in fundraising)
- Geneva Food Pantry (food items collected)
- Eco Committee
- SERRV
- Village Links
- Teen Moms Program
- Self Help Sewing
- Family Promise,
- Community Lunch Program
- Cafe Justo

Questions and suggestions:

How many groups within our church give to the same missions?

Opportunity Wall for volunteer sign-ups sounds like a good idea

New idea: Community Garden

Each month, focus on educating about a specific mission (in newsletter, website, or during worship)

Do we need a sub small group of people to survey Deacons, PW, SERRV to learn what they contribute to (not how much necessarily) to help us determine how we might better coordinate our mission efforts?

Membership & Evangelism (Jackie Augustine, facilitator)

Overall, it was discussed that the point of M&E is to recruit and engage members, bring the church's message out into the community, and bring the community into the church. Communicating the church's mission and sharing the church's activities with members and non-members alike is a key effort.

Things that are critical to M & E that should continue as is, or be a new area of focus:

- Gathering pew pad sheets (but do they have to be so large--concerns about wasting paper) and sending welcome letters to visitors
- Name tags (but provide blank tags for new people)
- Producing and updating the church brochure
- Welcome bags for visitors
- Coordinating new member classes, including recruiting participants and assigning sponsors
- Maintaining and updating email list (with ability to parse out by committee)
- Producing church directory and updating as needed, especially online members-only access
- Producing a monthly newsletter (coordinating a theme, offering an online-only option to save postage)
- Maintaining and updating a website for members to have information about what's going on
- Host non-worship events at the church to bring more people in (i.e. Geneva Night Out)
- Host church-sponsored events out in the community to raise awareness about the church (like a lakefront service)
- Track new member involvement and keep them engaged with activities, not necessarily committees
- Maintaining a web presence that is helpful to non-members and provides more about who we are/what we do and less about the nitty gritty scheduling
- Communicate that "all are welcome" (advertising, signs outside, messaging inside the doorways)
- Communicate with other groups about membership issues (with worship about adding more contemporary music to one service, with mission about giving people concrete ways to be involved other than on Sundays--and evangelizing through presence in the community)

All in all, I think these can be summarized into three things: Welcoming visitors into the fold; Increasing community exposure for the church and its mission; Connecting members to information about the church and ways to connect to the mission.

The following activities were either seen as necessary-but-not-critical or in need of substantial revision in order to remain necessary:

- Maintaining the rolls (maybe tracking attendance and giving is simply a staff role or a function of a finance committee)

- Engaging parents of Sunday school attendees to come to worship (maybe a function of youth or adult ed.)
- Bulletin inserts (maybe one piece of paper divided into “happening at the church” and “happening in the community” rather than multiple pieces of paper?)

In addition, I made note of the following ideas and suggestions that pertain to some of the above. These were not consensus items, but things that individuals raised during the discussion:

- The congregation needs to know who is using the building and when and make sure those groups know the needs of the church
- The directory is accessible online by members, but requires a password, many people aren't aware of this
- If the only purpose of maintaining the rolls is to collect the per capita, then we shouldn't be so lenient and finance should adopt a policy and staff implement
- Name tags should be smaller/easier to attach, maybe offer lanyards
- Pew pads should be cards instead to reduce paper, only filled out if someone is new
- Website looks dated, only works for people already well familiar with the church, doesn't attract new people
- Newsletter sometimes contains information that contradicts our mission, who has final editing approval? Shouldn't someone set a theme and monitor what's submitted?
- Newsletter should be on website in easily accessible form
- Newsletter should be electronic, sent via email unless someone specifically requests a paper copy to cut down on postage and printing costs
- Bulletin has too many pieces of paper each week
- Brochure display rack in fellowship hall gets messy and needs updating--who's in charge?
- New members should be asked to usher to make sure ushering isn't exclusive to people who always do it
- Church information should be given to realtors to be handed out when houses sell
- When sending emails, do not reveal individual email addresses
- Offer text messaging options
- Can't session members serve as liaisons without serving as chair?
- Can't we have fewer committees?
- Calendar of events should be displayed in hallway
- Calendar of church use should use technology to avoid double booking
- More evangelism within church and out in community

Property (Walt Gage, facilitator)

The overwhelming consensus was that the property committee does an outstanding job of:

- Seeing to general repairs or finding qualified craftsperson
- Overseeing work of custodians and maintaining current list of duties of custodians
- Monitoring electrical and heating operations
- Maintaining inside and outside of church (overseeing seasonal clean-up days)
- Maintaining memorial garden
- Trouble-shooting possible maintenance needs
- Evaluating feasibility of projects requested by groups using the building

Suggestions and Questions:

- Create policy (and criteria) for access to church keys, keeping list of who has keys.
- Is it time to rekey whole building?
- Create a policy to monitor use of building by outside organizations
- Develop plan for adding new and younger members to property committee to insure continuity.
- Continue evaluation church accessibility and long-term costs.

Notes from Worship discussion at retreat
(Virginia Champlin, facilitator)

Activities/Current Components of Worship

Two worship services

Summer worship at 9:30*

Special worship services – healing service, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday vigil

Order of worship

Communion*

Music: Choirs, Special music, Hymns, Instruments

Children's message

Lay readers

Acolytes program*

Flowers

Ushers

Quilts hanging

* Going well

New ideas for worship

- Include multi-media in worship services
- Record service or broadcast via Facebook, YouTube, Webex for shut-ins, others
- Increase diversity of music – add electric guitar, percussion
- Have one service year-round

Suggestions/Comments/Questions:

- Have acolytes at 8:15 service
- Include more “oldies but goodies” hymns during worship
- Provide more instructions to ushers, lay readers, people doing children's message
- Encourage more people to participate as lay readers
- Need to discuss which translation lay readers should use when reading scripture
- Ask people to listen quietly during prelude and postlude (music is part of worship)
- Need to plan for time when Joan retires as Acolyte trainer
- Be organized (10:30) service for “pageantry”
- Post framed explanation under each hanging quilt in sanctuary
- Order of worship keeps changing – seems strange to pass the peace at beginning of service
- Hard to find people to participate in Good Friday vigil
- Epiphany – afternoon rather than evening?
- Add special music at 8:15 service?
- Coordinate anthems to coordinate with sermon topic
- Nice to have words of anthems printed in bulletin
- Need more upbeat music
- Children's message sometimes too long; need to use child-friendly vocabulary; adults enjoy as much as children
- Chancel Guild members (communion prep, flowers) are aging; need new blood