

**Vision Workshop Report
UCCH Strategic Planning
May 18, 2019**

Part 3: Reports from Table Discussions

Facilitator: Dennis Pagano

- 1) What threads did you see running through the chalk talk?
 - Questions about faith and not being judgmental
 - Racism struggles, LGBTQ and La Mesa issues; knowledge of diversity not seen in other churches
 - Being allowed to voice opinions
 - Being asked to step into leadership positions
 - Many, small diverse groups promoting diversity understanding, e.g., women's group, book group, music, classes, meditation, bible study
 - Religiously tolerant; diverse theology comes together, empowered by church
 - Need for black or female pastor or both

- 2) Did anything surprise you?
 - Not much stated about art programs
 - Not much stated about environmental justice or climate change
 - How much my thoughts appeared in writings of others
 - No one said "do less".

- 3) Were there areas where you saw particular diversity of thought?
 - Some mentioned social justice from personal understanding (inward) vs. community (outward)
 - Personal issues; people stepping out of comfort zone, e.g., services
 - My cause/vision is most important, need to let go of that thinking
 - Always open to "left" thinking but don't minister to "non-left" groups or anything conservative

Facilitator: Doug Zabor

1. Themes:
 - both broad and specific aspects of philosophy and issues expressed
 - openness/willingness to accept change
 - engagement with the disenfranchised
 - deeper conversations

2. Surprises
 - Depth of awareness of need to "let go"

- sense of "starting points"
 - Start with recognition and continuation of current success.
 - Selflessness
 - Vulnerability
3. Particular Diversity of Thought
- personal viewpoints vs. view as a congregation
 - Our two Latino, one Latinx had a hard time speaking to the future as the current welcoming environment of one who could not speak English but felt one with our church and the other, gay male, who referred to how marginalized he had been (before here), a minority by being Latino, a double minority by being gay and after 8 years at UCCH, and finally in this last year, taking the effort to join in the voices you hear at La Mesa, helping out, engaging himself ~ he has a sense of liberation. Both talked of the love they feel.
 - Noting presence (and different perspectives) of "we should" and "I feel" statements expressed
 - Generalized sense of "we need to move faster because we should", we should have done more, vs personal thanks for being open and welcoming, worried that could be lost, and appreciation we are in a process of change..
 - diverse, different ways one can participate, be engaged, be nurtured
 - I saw the edges we have at UCCH:
 - those who have worked so hard to awaken us to our call to change now frustrated with slowness or perceived reluctance or resistance to change, (an older white woman)
 - those just joining the process of awakening and feeling the speed of change is just fine, and happy to have joined a church that challenges and encourages change (younger white women and kids)
 - and some who received acceptance regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, language who are experiencing change and can't stop talking about it, and simply hope we don't lose that. (Latino woman who can't speak English and Latinx man who is bilingual)
 - looking for ways to have a commonality but through different routes of participation

Facilitator: Melanie Joiner

1. Common threads:

- Music - Participation and Listening (i.e. UVOP and La Mesa). Some noted that UVOP is not being leveraged as it could be possibly due to leadership transitions on both sides.
- Beloved community (letting go of traditional worship style and being open to different styles)
- Courage to reach out to our larger community (concern about lack of visibility)
- People needing/wanting to be heard and listened to
- Realizing it doesn't have to be "my way"
- Not taking things personally and letting things go
- Releasing comfort and privilege

- Tension between di-dichotomy between children/youth ministry vs. adult ministry and their spiritual needs (Note: this was shared at our table but not necessarily reflected at the tables)

2. Surprises?

- Overall, nobody at our table was particularly surprised by anything, but more pleasantly surprised by people's honesty
- Also, some concern around the diversity of the concerns and feeling like we can only address some of them ("We can't do everything, but have been trying to for a long time")
- Multiple visions (i.e. some want diverse congregation and some not as concerned about that (also a note that "only the vocal people are being heard"))

3. Diversity of Thought

- Different priorities as reflected in the budget (i.e. La Mesa is not resources because budget lines from other places are not being reallocated)
- Tension around a Pastor-controlled vs. Congregation- controlled church
- May need different model for how the church operates on a day-to-day basis vs. strategic oversight
- Pastors used to attend all board/committee meeting but not the case anymore, seems to be lack of clear communication
- Feeling that the recent Parish Associate "package" vs responsibilities and expectations was unaligned and pathetic

Facilitator: Craig Smith

1. Threads:

- inclusive listening
- willingness to change
- courage
- passion for the beloved community

2. Surprises

- depth of awareness, openness, even selflessness (for example letting go of control, need to get credit, etc.)
- vulnerability and honesty
- large amount of inward/UCCH focus

3. Areas of Particular Diversity of Thought

- "I want" statements vs. "we should" statements
- diversity of ways in which people here get nurtured and enabled and encouraged here

Facilitator: Andy Short

Racial Justice/Racial Equity

Willingness to learn truth about white privilege and what we don't know about racial equity

Be more conscious of injustice in staffing

Having marginalized people in leadership

Leadership to immerse itself in racial justice

Need to address systemic racism and poverty
Recognize wider world
Take the church into the community
Coalition with other churches to fight local poverty (NAACP, Justice United)
Small groups important for relationships
Listen to the wisdom of the young
Be willing to accept change
Positive thoughts about La Mesa
Tension between La Mesa and traditional service
Spectrum of choices at UCCH
Kids learn to take action to help others
Consider how to attract young people
Tension between busy-ness on Sunday and quiet spiritual growth
Spread out worship to other days
Retain valuable parts of Euro church tradition

Need to Give Up/Release:

Comfort
White Euro-culture of church
White advantage

Facilitator: Aly Breisch

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Facilitator: Ingrid Schmidt

1. What threads did you see running through the Chalk Talk?
Quite a bit on La Mesa, SCOR and racism; also, ministries for children, choir. How can we be one congregation when we're coming from these different streams. Have to be able to accept others' streams openly.

A lot of comments based on “identity groups,” but also comments about reaching across groups. No need to give up identity groups, but need to build bridges to connect them. Small group conversations could help.

2. Did anything surprise you?

Theme of needing the courage to speak up when it’s not the popular opinion. Do we have a culture of political correctness that impedes this? [Response: yes, there is a fear of saying the wrong thing.]

3. Were there areas where you saw particular diversity of thought? If so, where?

Struggling with how there were many comments about giving up traditional worship. Don’t want to go to a loud service. Enjoy chamber singers and UVOP. Why does it have to be one thing over another, can it be “yes and...”? Has more to do with allocating resources, truly making it “AND,” reducing the disparities in resources.

One instruction from Jesus: Love one another. Not like one another. Big gulf between those two, and hard to follow.

For all our talk of different groups, we’re still mostly white, upper-class. Not that this stops us from having disagreements amongst ourselves. But still have the dream to have more people “not like me” as an active and influential part of the church.

This church will not be here 5 years from now if we don’t focus on families with children. Those voices were not here this morning (Saturday mornings are a hard time for families.) Are we losing young people? This year’s confirmation class is evidence of growth, but are those kids and their families integrating into the church?

Sometimes analytical thinking may not be right, it leaves out feeling, energy--you can overanalyze.

Some people feel there has been too much change, others feel not enough. Question: is it real change, or interpreted change? Core issue for those anxious about change is not knowing what’s going on, and not having a chance to process it.

Has the pace of change really picked up? Yes, in the day to day worship life, lost every leader except David. Need the rest of the structure to be expected in some ways, or at least not change immediately if it’s not critical. Many of the things that changed were not necessarily core things, and had provided a framework within which to process other changes. Process is important to help people get through change. Strong communication is critical.

While church leadership has changed, the lay leaders have not changed much. And it’s unclear how empowered they feel?

[response:] Many people feeling less empowered, less able to participate in decision-making processes. This may be due to differing interpretations of Susan Beaumont’s recommendations for

more centralized operations. Changing the staff reporting structure may have been necessary, but discernment and decision-making still needs to be widely participatory.

Difference between leaders by position vs leaders by influence.

Are there people who want to step up and feel like they can't? Yes. Ongoing trend (even before Cameron) that "difficult" voices are excluded.

Put minutes from each minute in a notebook and leave in public space. (Password protected part of website?)

Facilitator: Bonnie Armer, notes by Karen Demby

Major themes seen in Chalk Talk tables:

- Education of children and youth
- People are willing to give up many of their internal barriers as well as individual actions to realize our vision. One major thing people were willing to part with was control.
- Diversity in worship styles, leaders (Black preacher was mentioned specifically), and membership (race, sexual preference, ethnicity, age), and willingness to get to know those different from oneself, including different points of view.
- There were thoughts expressed about La Mesa and music on many fronts.
- Our responses as a whole tend to be 'variations on a theme.' At any given table, the majority of responses are congruent.

Other comments at table:

- Seniors feel left behind and ignored, especially the elderly who can't get to church easily. Having La Mesa in the Fellowship Hall removed one comfortable, easy to reach gathering place to 'say hi.' People feel the need to rush out of church vs engaging in fellowship.
- Are we serving fellow congregants in the way we need? This includes family issues as well as pastoral and caregiver support. Aly Breisch and Susan Steinberg had set up an infrastructure and their departure leaves a void.
- Who is going to preach my funeral? Who is going to know me well enough? [There are probably numerous other questions that having the majority of our pastoral staff being new could be asked]. Would it be possible to address these issues by tasking a committee to help people air and communicate concerns to the pastors and council.
- Phone calls are not being answered and emails are not being responded to.

One more issue needing clarification and follow up action. What are the rules concerning prayer and HIPPA? What permissions are needed to write down prayers in the prayer book? What permissions are needed to write down the prayers that are said openly in church? In the past, there was a process where the deacons made sure that the prayers that were uttered orally were written down in the book so that they could be included in the pastoral care listserv requests. Was this intentionally discontinued? If so, why? Is there a way to institute some way of making sure that pastoral care. *[Karen says: "I personally think that this particular item could be shared directly with the chair of the deacons. I would be happy to do that and open a dialogue with him about possible next steps."]*

Facilitator: Dan Vermeer

- The commitment to social, racial, and gender justice is very strong.
- So is commitment to be an open and welcoming beloved community.
- Still quite disconnected in our approach to the integration of these various efforts - little Biblical intersectionality.
- A worry that our commitment to diversity is somewhat undermined with a mostly white male face of leadership. Also concerns with church governance and decision making.
- Also a worry that our historical commitment to creation care is much less visible in our current vision - has it disappeared or did it just not come up because of the way the questions were articulated? A desire to enhance creation care (not just solar panels and recycling) in our vision, theology, and external expression.

Facilitator: Fred Joiner

Threads:

- (Letting go of) Comfort
- Desire for a variety of music
- Openness (to being uncomfortable) - letting go
 - Of bias
 - Of Legacy
 - Of Traditional liturgy
 - Of Traditions
- Social Justice
- Change is:
 - o Welcome
 - o Needed -----> - in worship services
 - La Mesa
 - More contemporary
- Greater community connection –outside of the church

Surprising things we observed looking at the worktables:

- “The church helped me go to jail” – speaking to the activist intentions and direct action of our church
- Willing to give up tradition/ Not hung up on old way of doing things
- Folks in our group were surprised to see thoughts on the continued mourning of Rick and Jill’s departure
- A lack of particular social justice focus in terms of specific direct actions or directed financial support.

Diversity of Thought

We saw 2 different way of thinking about Social Justice

1. Action – We saw that some folks expressed that their actions and work help them understand and make sense of their spiritual life. These folks seem to have a grounding and are ready to move and act.

2. Contemplative (?) – We saw that some folks expressed wanting to have a Biblical grounding that helped to inform whatever action they might take.

This shows the paradox and spectrum that Cameron preached about of the “woke” and the “still waking” making space for one another as we move forward.