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Report to Council  
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### Assessment of Small Group Gatherings

As you know, I met with several small groups of people from the congregation in January and February with the following questions:

1. **"What are our greatest strengths, joys, and ministries as a congregation?"**
2. **"What areas or ministries would you love to see be improved, strengthened, OR created?"**
3. **"What do you feel are the top ministry priorities of an excellent Pastor serving this congregation?"**

The purpose of the conversations was for me to get to know the congregation, but what it really did was give us a window into the heart of the congregation, and a sense of where we might put our energy as we move forward. The following is a narrative summary of the conversations:

Throughout the congregation is a sense of togetherness and a huge sense of accomplishment, not just for merging the two congregations together, but for the ethos of love and care that has developed in our midst through the process. "We care for each other;" "we are committed to listening, our work ethic, a sense of belonging;" "Christ is present with us." Commitment to our community through Christ is the foundation on which all else is built as we move forward.

We are experiencing a healthy tension in worship between embracing our ecumenical reality and naming our particular preferences in worship. While we cannot deny the ways in which we are formed and the elements of worship that feed our souls, the form of our worship seeks to make room for all. Our collective identity seems to include a value of silence and stillness as we enter worship, and (for some) as we reflect at the end. Several groups shared ideas for creative things to try in worship; a gift of our Anglican/United identity is that creative tension of tradition and innovation in our practice. The tensions we find here provide a healthy challenge for us to expand our containers in terms of our worship practice, however challenging we may find it.

As an extension of worship, music was a huge topic of conversation across the groups. While some thought the music (at least while choir is in session) is rich and diverse, others desire it to be so. We appear to be in agreement in the importance of music as a crucial element of worship, and the importance of including many musical styles. People spoke generously about the diversity of musical interest in our midst and making room for all. This much about music at CCG I feel clear. I'm thinking about sending out a congregational survey about music to hear from people directly about the use of VU and MV, and congregational singing in general – hopefully this will offer clarity for worship preparation.

There is a clear desire from many for more social connecting in the community – Whose Coming to Dinner? was mentioned by name many times (I haven't heard about how that went – I was sorry to miss it!) among other ideas. Social events provide opportunities to connect in a casual environment and an easy context in which to invite non-churched friends. Action items on this remain with the Social & Fun committee, which continues to make plans!

Those who are attending Bible studies/study groups are getting a lot out of this connecting time, both through a deepening of faith and deepening relationships. There is an expressed desire for a larger percentage of congregational participation in these groups, and more lay leadership as a discipleship opportunity. The desire for a men's group was expressed in a couple of the groups – available resources for such a group were also named! Now we just need a leader! There is also interest in annual Advent and Lenten study groups (this is indeed an intention of mine for next year . . . comments suggested this could include a lecture series or panel on a topic).

The pastoral care ministry is lifted up across the church as an extremely effective and vibrant ministry. Those who serve in this way take care of so much that most of us never hear about

and their ministry is deeply appreciated not only by those who receive the care, but the community as a whole. There is a feeling at CCG (for the most part) that we are being well taken care of. As is the case with many aspects of the church, many of those who are providing care feel weary, tired and long for more support.

Several outreach ministries were named and praised: PHC lunch, Shawl Ministry, Christmas Alive, sending cards to people, Strawberry Tea. Additionally, there is a sense that when there is a need in the community, people step up to help. Several groups wondered if there are more ways in which we can connect with and serve the Gabriola community. Are we ready for a big project? What is the need on the island? How can we offer our space? With whom can we partner? What does it look like to be the church in the world? What about Reconciliation?

People spoke of a desire for children in the congregation, new families and a sense of the next generation in our pews. Many wonder how we attract younger people and get a critical mass of children. How can we be more welcoming to young families? I picked up on the keen sense that the congregation has done all this work of creating a shared ministry so that we have a shot at sustainability into the future; thus, we need to be taking the next steps in that endeavour.

When answering the question of the minister's priorities, participants focused on the importance of Sunday services that run smoothly and are nourishing to the congregation, being an active member of the wider Gabriola community, raising the profile of and connections with the church, and helping the congregation live a sustainable vision of ministry (including training and inspiring congregants in discipleship and practices).

As we look at identifying a vision and/or values in the fall, these are good things to keep in mind. I intend to publish this information in a similar format in the weekly news, likely framed with the fall plans for visioning. Once the council is clearer on visioning, I will share this information more widely.