

Future of the Church Breakout Group
Report to Branch of Congregational Life

We had standing room only. As each person came in they were given a marker and asked to respond to the 5 questions that were posted around the room. 1) What do you think of when you hear the word “Christian”? 2) What are your hopes for the Church in the future? 3) What are your fears for the Church in the future? 4) What will the Church look like in 2050? 5) What questions do you have?

As we went through each sheet Becca Snedeker-Meier, a member of the PCUSA’s Vision 2020 Project, recorded their responses. Below are her notes.

- Fears:
 - Will we continue to be blinded?
 - Try to differentiate between the institution and the church
 - More hands-on mission
 - Keep the boards filled, buildings,
 - We are waiting on people to walk in the door
 - Why is the church not important anymore?
 - Does it matter to be part of a Christian community?
 - Fear of commitment
 - On the other hand, they want relationships not membership
 - The institution as we know it will die (fear and grief)
 - There cannot be resurrection without death
 - Continue to fight in the church that no outsider sees anything else
 - Do I follow God or feed my family?
 - Church is growing faster in every other section of the world except here
- 18-25 year old’s difference between what we believe Christian is (We quoted David Kinnanan from his book, unchristian, , “we found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are antihomosexual, judgmental, and hypocritical.” pg 27)
 - How do we turn this around?
 - Concerned to talk about being Christian
 - Everyone has a different definition
 - Give up the notion we own that term
 - Are we going to live into their definition?
 - Christian has become a political term
 - Why is it not important to ‘the young people’?
 - And their parents
- Hopes:
 - It will change and it needs to be so many different things (radically different)
 - Grass roots instead of top down
 - Love, grace, understanding, relevancy, growth, healthy, revival, move outside walls, mission, reach others, open, longevity
 - Bright future if we are willing to walk through the valley
 - Being authentic Christian
 - Elders step up and take on some responsibility because they are called to do so
 - Church buildings that are used for the mission and community as opposed to for themselves

Then quoting Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon in their book, Weird Church, “We believe the good news for this era is rooted in the story of Pentecost. It is good news for the whole world. But the church leaders need it as much as anyone these days!...(At Pentecost) to say the band of followers were *afraid* some fifty days after Easter would be a gross understatement. *Numb* would probably more accurately describe the mood...And it was in this moment and in this place where the Weird Thing happened...In the wake of this Weird Thing, the Jesus movement began to spread and to innovate on the fly; creativity came to life...Even as many twentieth-century churches fall into ruins, something wonderful is coming. If God is in it, it is going to be good. Much of what is coming is going to stretch our current imagination.” (pp7-9).

- What the future will look like:
 - Number one answer: smaller
 - Busy, smaller but vibrant, thriving, more focused, home churches, YMCA + Red Cross, striving, faithful, stronger, gone, spiritual, present in the world, insignificant
- Questions:
 - What’s my role?
 - How can I help?
 - How can we help today?
 - What will happen when I’m gone?
 - How does the small church redefine itself?
 - How do we address the young and the old member’s needs?
 - How is God working in the world?
 - How do we keep the message alive in the world?
 - How to keep/renew/explore theological foundations?
 - How do we connect to the recent outcry of love and hope and so against hate?
Are we going to live into their definition?
 - Jessie thinks there needs to be major changes if not revolution.

Submitted by David Montgomery and Becca Stenecker-Meier
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