

RE SHAPE

TRANSFORMING CHURCH INITIATIVE

Small Group Summary Log

Small Group Number: Composite

Small Group Date: Meeting # 1

Primary Insights Generated This Session:

QUESTION #1

What life disruption type events are part of this church's history? These events can be external and/or internal ... past, recent or anticipatory.

- Change of pastors
 - Several changes of Lead Pastors (5) (personality types - theology)
 - It would be nice/more engaging if they could "tell a story" and not read directly from notes- that is hard but it better connects with the congregation
 - Any time there are changes of church leadership, it causes disruption
 - pastor changes require disciple adaptation; members choosing to leave because of differences in religious beliefs
- Changes of Staff and their key responsibilities (8)
 - The continuing trend to hire staff that may have the right credentials on paper and very nice people but are not relatable to the younger folks
 - multiple staff retirements past two years,
- Declining attendance
 - Prior to the tornado & pandemic the "competition" for young families had already begun from breakaway churches or the arrival of mega churches that catered to the younger crowd.

- The exodus to other bodies of faith may be tough to turn around. I remember one of our leaders asked a few years back to count the churches we pass by on our way to St. Mark & consider why we don't stop at one of those. There are more of those on my path now.
- Reduction of church and Sunday school attendees – drastic loss in numbers of children and youth (4)
- people have gotten out of the habit of church attendance
- A lot of options of ways people spend their time Sundays (culture)
- Competition of mega churches
- The programming for youth is the reason we arrived at this church.
- The continued trend to be locked into formality that it makes the younger folks, un-churched, those seeking a sense of community feel uncomfortable/like they don't fit
- Worship
 - Multiple changes to Worship, Sunday School and meeting dates, times (4)
 - Worship format changes (times of services) (order of worship and liturgy) and components (offerings – online vs. personal blessing)
 - The timing of the services has been a struggle for me over the years. I have always felt like 10am would be the perfect time, so I can say I have not been attending as regularly as I would like. When I was working and going to Grad school it became a challenge to get the motivation to go to the church mainly because it felt like Sunday morning was the only time to catch my breath. It may seem like an easy excuse to blame the timing of the service, but I truly feel it has played a big role.
- Pandemic (8)
 - including many mixed messages & “in fighting” relative to masks, vaccines, virtual meetings, etc
 - Church being closed
 - viewing church via zoom - difficult issues in rural areas(2)
 - No choir - then choir with mask
- Financial
 - Financial “recession”: Membership is declining, one third of the church does not support our mission financially

- There was a "dark period" before pastoral change. Lots of building but no church member support or money. Taking on big, new dept. Folks were angry and resentful, left or stopped gifting. Staff cuts- ,secretary. Cut programs. Pastor David just added to problems already here. His departure was contentious. No new members.
- Church financial worries disappeared with burning of the mortgage
- Building
 - Commons room/Youth Center/Sanctuary Redesign – Building
 - Building changes in 1995 and 2008 – now have potential to grow into full utilization – not all supported 2008 changes
 - Have opportunity to show the accepted love of Christ
- Uncertainty of what will happen to the Methodist Church next year and how we deal with the decision as a faith community (LGBTQ issue) (8)
 - Discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons, especially rights serving in the church
- Racial Injustices – response of church (4)
 - Civil rights movement and being in the south
 - Historically this church does not seem to have had a racially diverse congregation and is located in a southern state with a lot of past racial trauma. The BLM movement has additional meaning and consideration in this setting;
 - April 2020 Tornado (9)
- History
 - Looking back in history - In the early 1900s the church building was destroyed by fire. The church survived the Spanish Flu of 1918. I'm sure the 2 world wars were life disrupting events as family and friends suffered the loss of loved ones and others returning home suffering the memories of war. Saint Mark was there for comfort and guidance.
 - extremely fast withdrawal from Afghanistan has affected our members;
 - 9/11 has brought back memories of church members;
 - Following 9/11 – Pastor Steve Morgan brought in a Muslim – noted not responsible

- 1959 auto accident that killed 3 beautiful 14 year-olds (2) – terrible family disruption – pastor stood up to preach in service following the accident and couldn't say a word- music started and he ,Rev Jimmy Merchant went to his knees at the altar to pray – very moving
- Disruptions in this church's history include the move from the downtown location to the present location, the influx of people from other parts of the country in the past 30 years, and the recent pandemic/tornado.
- I imagine that relocating to our present site in 1959 was exciting, but disruptive.
- Demise of thriving textile industry created pockets of extreme poverty within the state and local community;
- Development of the area (lake communities) has brought more wealthy and/or retired people to the area (wealth disparity/cultural differences/changing age demographic);
- Changing roles of women.
- Loss of community outreach (picking up kids for VBS, Sunday School, etc.)
- Projects
- Graying of the congregation
- National politics, loss of civility and respect for differences
- Loss of Stephen Ministry, Disciple bible studies, Walk to Emmaus community
- Increased need for security – locking doors, offering security(2)
- Having to get new equipment for online and training
- CDC a new ministry in 1997 – some opposition, but got it going – some attempts to close it, but CDC has prevailed
- Politics (3) - how we learn how we stay unified
- Doctrine of Christian Discovery

QUESTION #2

How has God sustained you during this volatile season?

- Prayer (7)
 - I seek God during the day and events in daily "life" help me to see and understand Him.
 - Talking with God through prayer.

- Prayer is a source of strength for me. Knowing that God does not cause tornadoes or pandemics, but expects me to walk through life and its hard times w grace and with an open heart and mind, supporting others along the way, has sustained me and my faith. Good friends and their support show God’s mercy and grace as well.
- Brings peace when my mind spirals into worry. I pray daily for health and safety of family/friends.
- Family/friends/fellowship
 - God has blessed me with a loving spouse and family, as well as a supportive church fellowship. Circle, the tornado task force, zoom sessions and wonderful neighbors helped us during the storm cleanup. God has helped me use the time at home to learn through reading about current issues, and to use my sewing and gardening to help others.
 - Fellowship is critical. “We are strengthened by being with fellow disciples” in worship services, choir, Sunday school, Wednesday evening dinners, church meetings, etc.
 - Our family found creative ways to remain connected because this brought great comfort. I think God is in that. (2)
 - Choir-“they are like family to me”.
 - Friends-they brought me meals.
 - Face timing time with family;
 - Family and friends (2) – connecting with folks - relationships
 - He has kept me close to family, given me new opportunities, and helped me through hard times
- Outreach
 - Outreach still going on
 - Outreach/Inreach - Delivering Care Packages for homebound persons
 - The love and caring of our disciples. Helping at Ann Hope is a blessing from God. Turn personal fears and worry over to God.
- Tornado
 - The Tornado helped unify us to care for others.
 - Care packages given to many.
 - It was good to see the progress each day getting back to hope.
 - My house took a direct hit from tornado – people came to help – very quick call from church staff member

- Able to safely continue to do for others after the tornado. (cleanup, etc) (2)
- Knowing the God is with us in the good and the bad as he has shown us in the tornado
- Strength, power, and hope from God to keep going (3)
- Community, connectedness (knowing everyone was in the same situation)
- New ways of connecting – Zoom (5) - Zoom allowed us to still be together
- Bad days come more often than they used to it seems...it's a big challenge some days to avoid the negativity all around. God has provided peace and comfort to keep going when it's very easy to give up. I consider myself a positive person who looks forward to each day and it has been much more a challenge to stay positive during the pandemic, but God has helped.
- Bible Study (3)
- Music and Hymns
 - Being able to still sing with the contemporary worship team
- Nature
- Donation Wednesdays (3)
- Faith in overcoming VUCA
- Financial support has continued
- God has inspired those who were able to provide worship service streaming; Online worship
- Remembering the assurance that with God "This too shall pass";
- Getting outside and enjoying the beauty of the earth;
- Discovery channel to view beautiful places
- God has shown us how to be adaptable to others.
- We were shown we are not in control. It is God's plan.
- We have come a long way through faith but then have struggled at times.
- God has sustained through my community and friends and having adaptive ways of meeting.
- I have had eyes to see all the good that other people are doing.
- Slowing down has been good for perspective - I've realized I am not in control and that is a good thing
- God revealing strength of relationships when you can't be physically together.
- I've actually attended worship more often since it's online.

- Bible – what is God’s will?
- Other discussion groups
- Turning to other sources such as Anderson Progressive Theology group when couldn’t go to church
- Gives comfort in all He's provided during this chaotic time.
- Helped create an inner peace and faith during the chaos of everything going on.
- God has sustained me through caring contact with others via phone, text or email. Reading and reflecting also helped: Virus as a Summons to Faith (Walter Breuggeman) and God and the Pandemic (N. T. Wright)
- I am thankful the Church continued to offer The Upper Room for daily devotionals and made them available on Wednesdays when the Church was open for donations. The devotionals were especially meaningful to me during this time. Daily prayers helped sustain me during this season.
- Reassurance, hope, love, community.
- Spending more time reflecting and reading
- Somehow kept me and most of my loved ones alive and well and given me some trace of peace and stability, even with some anxiety always trying to creep in.

QUESTION #3

How has being involved with our church been a source of strength for you during these volatile events?

- Outreach
 - A few outreach ministries that continued that helped us feel that we were still a church (2)
 - Volunteering, continuing to do what we could do and finding new opportunities arising –
 - The church provided opportunity to volunteer and care for others.
- Worship
 - Online worship – video and live stream (4)
 - Love the sermons, live streaming was wonderful
 - We haven't been as involved since COVID began... but we appreciate all the church has done to reach its members virtually. And for their

consideration of concerns for safety measures as COVID has worsened again.

- I have listened on Sunday to other church's services whose pastors used to be with us, and have waited for our services to return so that I can enjoy going to church with my family!
 - I stayed away and worshiped virtually mostly during the first half of the pandemic. I really did miss being there in person and being around our church family.
 - Virtual worship kept hope alive, along with the knowledge that eventually we would be able to return to Sunday School, Worship and Choir.
 - Having the online worship was helpful although it often had issues
 - Live streaming and taping church services was an excellent way to be engaged
 - While online worship is helpful for those who cannot physically come to church it also can be used as an excuse not to attend.
- Zoom
 - Zoom for bible study and circle
 - Some Sunday School classes kept consistent connections even through zoom.
 - Being able to use ZOOM to have circle meetings was wonderful because at the beginning we could share our feelings about the tornado and pandemic.
 - Having our small group on zoom has been a great way to stay connected – I've been able to continue to be candid and close and it's been a way for me to feel close with God.
- Tornado
 - Belonging to St. Mark has helped through in-person help to recover from the tornado.
 - Being part of this church has helped me to work with others recover from the tornado
 - The church has helped me to get through the tornado; He always gives us hope to get through
 - Interacting with other disciples to help people during the tornado recovery Serving on a church committee

- St. Mark did not reach out to members of the church who were tornado victims in the neighborhood in a timely manner. It took several days before anyone from the church checked on members.
 - Serving on tornado task force was a blessing – everyone that was asked responded
 - I think the way the church came together for the community after the tornado was very inspiring.
- Small groups checking up on each other
 - Heartbeat
 - Financial giving, knowing that it was going to help the community (3)
 - New ways to give (online)
 - Response of Saint Mark disciples to tornado relief and coronavirus care
 - Staying involved has given us all a sense of purpose. Everyone in our group is very involved in Finance, Trustees, or Stewardship committees, choir and worship support activities. We have a sense of purpose to support St. Mark and be better disciples of Christ
 - We asked a question of each other: “How do those without faith in God, survive in these volatile times?”
 - Staff meetings to debrief experience
 - UMC responses to racial injustice
 - Even though it’s different, its constant. It is there.
 - UMW gave a group connection and even started some new contacts and friendships.
 - Choir-we came back as soon as we could to support the congregation
 - I was very upset because we had a luncheon at the church and did not even think to invite the congregation worshipping in the Commons Room. I felt it was rude and was shocked. We need other churches.
 - People have been lost from our congregation-who is reaching out?
 - Who is caring for the shut-ins?
 - Our pastors did not visit those in the congregation with sickness, surgery, hospitalized even before the pandemic. Text messages don’t work.
 - people taking in other families who had no home to live in;
 - church was willing to allow another church to use our facilities when their church was damaged;

- replanting of the trees that were destroyed from the tornado;
- we were able to call on others for help
- We seemed to focus more on Jesus during these events.
- We made more time to learn about others.
- Being involved in the church shows that “I can be a part of affecting change that betters our community.”
- Being a part of the church is a way to impact the world/community.
- Being part of our church is “really cool” because we actually get to help real people. This was especially so seeing the Methodist connection in action (UMCOR) in response to the tornado and the ways we were able to really help.
- Very aware of the importance of connection this year.
- Faith Formation Sunday this year – a service all together and being able to have a potluck after so long was so good! It’s still sustaining to think back on that moment of being able to be together eating.
- Being associated and working with people of great faith and willing to help each other. Support by love, finances and friends that are as close or closer than family. Feeling safe at St. mark during times of personal life disrupting event.
- Support when son died was remarkable; family living together; SS class very supportive – don’t know if would have made it through without the support
- Spouse’s mother suffering from dementia – able to call and talk to and pray with pastors
- It’s been a challenging year – spouse with dementia, lost sister-in-law, nephew and brother, about to lose brother-in-law; group of ladies within church came to the rescue – don’t know if could have made it without that group
- Honestly it hasn’t except for the missions that I am involved in.
- There are a lot of missed opportunities for the church to connect and support its members, and I think most of those opportunities have been missed. Examples: there has been no sustained effort to bring people that think/feel differently about race, politics, or sexual orientation together; outdoor services etc during the pandemic.
- The church has provided spiritual sustenance in a time of uncertainty, and many opportunities to reach out and help others in the community

- I remember being a member of the youth group at the church during 9/11. As an 8th grader I was confused and scared, the church provided a sense of comfort that I was unable to find elsewhere. Everything seemed unknown but the church seemed like a constant. The on-going pandemic has also shown the true value of the church. Knowing other members are praying for your safety during these times goes a long way. There are many other times, but these two events impacted everybody so they came to mind first. When everything else was closing the church found a way to offer services digitally. It would have been easy to say “well, it’s not safe and it’s too difficult to offer digital church” but instead the church found alternative means to reach the members.
- Unfortunately, I don't feel like our church has been a source of strength during these times, or within the last couple of years.
- The Church is a source of strength for us and the community. But I feel that St. Mark has missed opportunities to address COVID and other events, like the fires that ravage the western part of the U.S. Also, we need to pray weekly for our health care providers. I can't imagine the stress that many of them are undergoing during this difficult time. Our prayers are the least that we should be doing...
- The Heart Beat kept me informed of Church initiatives and donation opportunities. It was a source of strength for me to be able to provide for others in need. Providing online services on Sunday morning allowed me to worship God with the congregation virtually.
- During the pandemic I started to feel cut off and isolated. The online worship, zoom bible studies, zoom choir meetings, weekly email newsletters, were invaluable in helping me to stay connected, feel supported, have a positive outlook and continue to grow. Once we were able to start meeting in person again, hearing the experiences of others and talking with others was especially meaningful.
- Music- this is what brings me to most fulfilled spiritually from the church
- Although we have not been “attending” church in a long while and have had trouble watching some Sunday mornings, God has kept several key families we have always been in touch with in the congregation, even closer than before, and that has certainly helped.

QUESTION #4

What is your primary takeaway from our group time today?

- Reshape
 - Leadership makes a huge difference
 - Strong leadership is necessary for a project such as this
 - I am glad our leadership thought enough to want to hear our ideas.
 - Our group today was interactive and vocal. We support the small group ReShape activity to provide feedback of ideas and new initiatives for our church to strengthen and thrive in the Body of Christ. However, we are somewhat skeptical that the COS will recommend and initiate changes.
 - We are hopeful that this ReShape effort will bring needed change and revitalize our mission.
 - We are looking for change for improvement, not just to have change.
 - ReShape is pulling me back to church.
 - We don't want ReShape to be just another book like "Shift" was which was another Pinnacle publication. It did not work. Maybe we can do better with this book.
 - We need action.
 - I am anxious to see what our moving forward is going to look like.
 - grateful for the opportunity to go through this study and to meet other church members;
 - to be able to discuss our concerns
 - Great to hear the passion for our church and that it is important to all of us.
 - Great to hear other's concerns.
 - Seems like a difficult task that we will tackle together.
 - Change has happened before – and eventually things are okay
 - I'm hopeful for the future of church
 - Learn more about group members and some of St. Mark history. Discussion about the Mega Churches versus St . Mark. They do church in a different way. They're reaching young people- music and small groups. But,we at St. Mark don't have to follow Mega Church way. "Maybe just be the church of retired folks". . The demographics

of St. Mark location are against us for reaching youth, but we are still serving the community. Referral made to Ann Hope and how they take care of their community. Are they reaching the un-churched more? Should we strengthen our relationship with that church, youth and community? Same responses about re-establishing connection (especially women) with New Harmony. "Sunday School" for youth doesn't sound like fun. Too formal a title. Small Groups youth meetings off campus - more fun sounding. We need to show love to our youth.

- My primary takeaway is that we are in a process led by good leaders and that the process is a good one - allowing for personal and church community growth. I'll be satisfied if St. Mark could become more open and inclusive and sharing truth - reshaping in ways that attract the next generation without "turning off" the current (leadership) generation. Simply put: change with the future in mind, using the New Testament as a guide and relying on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for planning the reshaping.
- I hope the RESHAPE project will invigorate both the Traditional service and the Contemporary service and our church in general. I hope it will revitalize our membership to connect with those individuals that need a helping hand in our community.
- I hope creative, adaptive change will result in a more vital fellowship and outreach.
- I'm at the beginning stages of understanding where this project is leading us as a congregation.
- Am excited to participate in this timely and valuable project. It is a huge challenge and responsibility to consider reshaping and transforming our church.
- I am hopeful that this will bring to light the "holes" that are keeping the young folks/young families away from St. Mark
- I hope this project brings to light that if our church wants to grow our young families and youth numbers (as it says it does), they need to shift the way they think and market the services.
- I hope this project will help St. Mark adapt so that we can offer services, activities and studies that leave the congregation spiritually

awakened and fulfilled so that we can hopefully be a light to others during this dark time in our nations history

- I think my answer to the question above 'Tell us why you ... Small Group?' answers this question. I could add that past experience with small groups at this church and at my former employer has convinced me that I do not interact with others.
- This small group experience has given me a chance to reflect and make time to think about our church; 1st chapter was hard for me to get started, the 2nd chapter was better
- Personal care/pastoral care/congregational care seems to have been lost. It does not seem to be a priority. Monthly newsletter used to have a message from the Pastor, sometimes, inspirational, sometimes funny.
- Politics and culture come with us to church. We are many people with many viewpoints. The publications we send out need more balance to reflect the wider diversity of opinions held by all of the members of the congregation.
- Like most churches, St. Mark has become weaker in areas such as worship attendance, youth activities, fewer pledge units, and community volunteerism.
- VUCA events are not surprising to us.
- We continue to try to be the church following life disrupting events
- We always seem to find a way that God is leading us forward
- Greatest obstacle is "Snap Back" church
- We are all in this together.
- Hope for our church
- I want to become more involved in the church.
- We are not alone, we are coming together, we are not alone.
- We have different attitudes but yet are still connected, we are understanding and patient with each other.
- We are still hopeful for the future despite the disruptions we have been facing.
- Positive attitudes;
- our church means so much to all of us;

- seek and yearn for tradition in church worship. It brings comfort, spirituality and a time for reflection.
- a church that regularly speaks to current and relevant social issues (led by the senior pastor)!
- A lot of interested people care for what this church is and what it can become.
- God has always seen people through hard times and change
- I'm not alone in my feelings about General Conference
- I'm extra thankful for this community
- Disruptive and volatile events require us to adapt, be flexible, and learn from the experiences in order to carry on Christ's mission for the church, which may look different than past church experiences
- The Good Lord will help you through anything!
- I think having a church family during stressful life events provides stability and a place to pray and find peace.
- It is important to process what we have experienced together, and to learn from these experiences how we might become more effective in our witness and service, both to one another, and to the community at large.
- Hoping to see how others have dealt with these tough times and ways to find happiness in a world of negativity and unknowns.
- I'm not 100% certain what this means. I'm certainly still glad to be a part of this church after all this time.

Additional Observations by Small Group Leader:

- Very diverse group of folks. Bonded immediately.
- Everyone had done their homework and came ready to share.
- Everyone participated in the discussions.
- Time at the Church ranged from 3 years to 52 years.
- The group was very engaging and interested in the fact that the leadership of the church wanted input from the individuals in the congregation.
- I think Mark Tidsworth did a good job setting the stage and building a foundation for our work together.
- 3 negatives regarding the book - "just another Pinnacle publication.

- Large group but seemed to work OK. The session was 2 hours long but allowed all who wanted to speak the opportunity (18 attending, 3 absent).
- Audio visual worked well in the Acts Class.
- Everyone was interested and hopeful.
- We have a wonderful group of disciples who listened to each other and interacted in a positive way. We are excited for this time together.
- Finally, the group worked together on BOC workout on pp 28 and came up with the following rankings: (numbers 1 and 4 were easiest to assign) 1- desire for normalcy. 2- denial. 3- overwhelmed church. 4- trusting to chance.
- In addition, we did BOC workout together on pp 42. Found St. Mark has done/is doing the majority of Anticipated Outcomes. We did not get into discussion of laying aside activities which have come to an end of their life cycle, nor greater spiritual imagination, unfolding call while moving ahead.

Small Group Leader Needs or Questions: None

Date and Time of Next Small Group Session: