

**Countryside Community Church
Discernment Sessions Preliminary Findings
Annual Meeting February 13, 2022
817 Total Comments**

Countryside overall – 306 Comments

Church Community – 154 Comments

Sub-Themes:

Personal and Spiritual Connection	More needed: Joining small groups and engagement with boards, new member welcomes, open discussion forums, sharing stories and journeys, youth engagement, membership directory.
Part of our Identity	Explore and understand: Perceptions of Countryside as a church community, part of UCC, Christianity, mission.

Key Comments:

- *Build upon and intentionally nurture personal connections.*
- *Need to understand our past while moving forward.*
- *We want visionary challenges: challenges that rely on, and originate from relationship. New and old members are “woven in” as they are encouraged to follow their call.*
- *Service builds community and community builds service.*

Worship Experience – 56 Comments

Sub-Themes:

Music Connection	Deep appreciation for Countryside’s music ministry, singing, choir. Traditional and also contemporary focus.
Scriptural Connection	Beyond sermons: Story-based, historical context. Make it relevant to our lives. Put us in the picture.

Key Comments:

- *We want to sing!*
- *Feel motivated to leave/feel good about our potential to 'be ok' and simultaneously 'make a difference'*

Minister Presence – 50 Comments

Sub-Themes:

Attributes	Spiritually mature and confident, relatable to all, liberal thinker, intellectual, Scripturally-grounded, strategic, inspirational, respectful.
Training and Faith Practices	Convey Scriptural meaning and Progressive Christian tenets. Comfortable with mystery; invites further study and reflection.
Experience and Track Record	Understand congregation characteristics. Balance inspiration with intellectual and spiritual growth.
Pastoral Skills	Acknowledge our experience with abandonment and trauma, help us grieve and move on.

Key Comments:

- *“Teach vs Preach”*
- *A seasoned minister...interested in knowing the congregation and building rapport with individuals.*
- *Challenge us to see and understand things in a new way – given biblical history, context – then go into the world and walk the talk.*
- *Team builder – a true record of accomplishing this. Experience required.*
- *Maybe we need a true interim to get back to a healthy process.*

Countryside Resiliency - 46 Comments

Sub-Themes

Countryside Needs	Need for healing. Acknowledge and address our individual and collective grief and trauma. Hold each other in grace and love. Serve each other. Intentionally build resiliency.
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Key Comment:

- *“Serve in so we can serve out”.*

Question 1: How do we want to be challenged spiritually and intellectually?
211 Comments

Learning and Growth – 123 Comments

Sub-Themes

Intellectual and spiritual challenge	Continue and build upon: Bible studies, Center for Faith Studies, challenge our beliefs, explore questions, balance between spiritual and intellectual; small groups, panel discussions, multi-generational studies, UCC series.
Openness	Continue to engage in mutual respect for diverse perspectives. Embrace continuous learning. Learn and practice healthy conflict, being comfortable with and actually welcoming disagreement, and constructive and empathic discussion of controversial topics.
Scriptural connection	Interpret Bible stories and apply them to our lives.

Key Comments:

- *Balance between spirituality (heart) and intellectual engagement (head)*
- *“Listen to Learn”*
- *“Honoring our diverse opinions – it’s ok to disagree. Disagreement is where we learn and grow”.*
- *A non-dualistic approach*
- *“Honor curiosity and asking questions”*

Spiritual Learning and Growth – 18 Comments

Sub-Theme

Spiritual Challenge	Continue Center for Faith Studies, Darkwood Brew-style sessions. Don’t just stay in our heads - be emotionally connected.
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Key Comment:

- *“Emphasize personal reflection and inner spirituality like through the Examen, classes, interplay, retreats”.*

Intellectual Learning and Growth – 14 Comments

Sub-Theme

Intellectual challenge	Studying Scriptural context and culture to help apply it to our lives.
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Key Comment:

- *Love Abraham’s White Board – expand knowledge about it.*

Progressive Theology – 39 Comments

Sub-Theme

Identity	Understand Countryside's history and use to inform our future. Continued focus on: "open and affirming", "freedom from dogma", "freedom to question", Phoenix Affirmations", "All are welcome", "Many paths to God", rejection of certainty. Learn more about UCC and workings of Countryside -what is unique about Countryside and how does UCC collaboration work?
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Key Comment:

- *"Feed Countryside's Progressive Christian Spirit".*

Interfaith Learning – 17 Comments

Sub-Theme:

Interfaith Learning	Explore Abrahamic faith commonalities and differences. Build on Center for Faith Studies. Learn more about all three faith traditions.
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Key Comment:

- *I want to learn how to defend my faith; understand how we are different in our beliefs and practices and how we are the same.*
- *Connect spiritually with our partners – include in sermons what Islamic and Jewish faiths see in the story / message.*

Question 2: What is our call to serve? 163 Comments

Active Service – 71 Comments

Sub-Themes

Community Outreach	Broaden our outreach (immigrants, other marginalized groups). Understanding where the needs are.
Personal Connection	Revisit Festival of Talents and volunteer database. Improve and expand upon congregation engagement through service opportunities, UCC designations.
Personal and Spiritual Connection	Connecting contemplation with action. Discerning individual and collective passions and gifts.
Part of our Identity	Aligning our service with Jesus' teachings, Countryside's history and mission statement, Phoenix Affirmations, Tri-Faith partnership. Prioritization needed.

Key Comments:

- *Align our service with Jesus' teachings.*
- *Take the message "All are Welcome" to the community.*
- *We need to be standing up for what we profess to be our values...ACTION required.*
- *Act. Church needs to transform people!*

Live our Faith – 44 Comments

Sub-Theme:

Connection to Scripture	Following Jesus - serving the least of these (ex: LGBTQ+). Seeing God in all. Jesus was all about social justice.
Identity	Challenge each other to live out our mission statement. Be Christ-centered and UCC-grounded.

Key Comments:

- *Love is an action word.*
- *"Serving is not being the hero".*
- *Joining the people we serve – being part of their experience.*

Community Care – 29 Comments

Sub-Theme:

Community basic needs	Continue and expand upon Countryside’s current programming - food pantry, Meals on Wheels, Box, youth engagement, Community Cupboard.
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Key Comments:

- *Service programs explore what other things can we get involved in to address issues like the need for affordable housing (Habitat for Humanity). Retirees have time.*
- *Get our hands dirty – pantry and other challenging jobs.*
- *Identify groups working with immigrants and partner to help with needs; i.e. literacy, financial literacy, housing, family support, etc. Is the Tri-Faith community working on this?*

Community Leadership – 19 Comments

Sub-Theme:

Community activism	Social justice advocacy, use our privilege to stand up for others. Illustrate that service is not limited to generosity, but a significant component is Justice. Generosity and Justice are integrally connected. We need to support efforts to change systems, support the ongoing need to help others.
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Key Comments:

- *Are we ready for political activism? Are we called to speak out more? Join OTOC? Take public stands on moral issues. Focus on environmental activism locally.*
- *Engage other Christians to challenge exclusivity.*

Question 3: What does it mean to be a Christian member of the Tri-Faith partnership? 137 Comments

Sub-Theme:

Personal connection	Process for learning how to visit each others' worship communities respectfully is needed. Model "living in community" with our partners more frequently. Sharing meals. The cookie exchange was fun. Honor their high holy days like when our Jewish partners came to hand out candy canes after the Christmas Eve service.
Personal and Spiritual Connection	Continue and expand upon collaboration: Stories from the Bridge, picnics, small groups study and dinners, youth council, joint community service projects. Community garden fosters mutual responsibility for each other and our community.
Identity	Share pre-move discernment process with new members - 101 and 102 courses.

Key Comments:

- *"Help Tri-Faith come to life through relationships and engagement."*
- *"Throw our heart over the bar and say....I am going to be a part of it".*

Please engage with the next steps in this analysis by reflecting on this information, and consider the following:

- What questions do you have?
- What else would you like to share?
- What next steps are you interested in:
 - Additional discussions
 - Other information needs
 - Deep dives
 - Other themes to explore together as a church community

Please watch for more communication about our discernment process as we complete the analysis process and transition into action!

Feel free to share your feedback with Church Council at moderator@countrysideucc.org