

## **Plymouth Leadership Council Retreat, August 21, 2021**

The following is a summary of discussions and ongoing questions at the Leadership Council Retreat, held on 21 August 2021 at Trinity Lutheran Church, 9:00 am – noon, with all members of Council in attendance. In all-group and small-group discussions, our goal was to articulate connections among the Strategic Plan 2021-2026, the Wimberly staff redesign recommendations, and the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center's consultation outcomes.

**STRATEGIC PLAN:** A review of the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan led to these observations:

1. We need a periodic review of the budget in light of the plan; in order to do that we need to:
2. Communicate the Plan more clearly to boards and motivate them to align their activities and their budget requests with the Plan.
3. We need to communicate the Plan more often (and often again) to congregation as a whole, including adult forums and “congregational conversations.”
4. We need to remind congregation and ourselves that while the Plan appears to prioritize millennial and Gen Z members and potential members, that the best understanding of the Plan is that it is fully inclusive of all ages and generations (this point was made in the Wimberly discussion, but is included here as an important overall observation).

**WIMBERLY REPORT:** Questions: do we accept the recommendations? If so, what are the implications of the proposals, and how do we move forward?

1. Acknowledging the value of staff that has two FT ministers and a church administrator, what are the budget implications?
2. How will the hiring of a FT church administrator alter and redefine the role of the senior minister?
3. Has Plymouth shifted from the “congregational” or “familial” model to something more “corporate” in governance, and what are implications of that shift?
4. How do we acknowledge the cultural/emotional consequences of that shift? How does that shift affect our ways of communicating and making decisions?
5. How are other changes/disruptions in Plymouth's life acknowledged and grieved: e.g. pandemic, staff changes and turnover?
6. How might we move toward a volunteer coordinator to help populate committees and boards, and might that person also serve as an ombuds?

Summary: We accepted the Wimberly staff recommendations. There was a general sense that we should work promptly toward hiring a FT church administrator with the intention of shifting day-to-day management duties away from senior minister and freeing that person up for pastoral and public-facing responsibilities (as the Wimberly report recommends). Second, we appeared to be in agreement that we will explore extending the remit of a bridge minister **well into** 2022 should the need arise.

LOMBARD REPORT: Questions: what stood out for you in this report? What are we doing well? What/where can we improve?

1. Positive emphasis on quality of music, lived values, and hospitality
2. Need to offer care to staff (ministerial, professional, office) as well as receive care from them
3. How can Plymouth better communicate with its members and within its structure (LC, boards, committees, ministry teams, staff)?
4. How can we better facilitate feedback, including feedback that is critical?
5. What is the challenge of our size, and how do we address that challenge?
6. How does Plymouth handle conflict: among members, between members and staff? Do we have adequate ways to do that, and willingness to acknowledge and work through conflict?
7. What is Plymouth's "culture," going forward?

Summary: The Lombard consultation document revealed a mix of deep love and appreciation for Plymouth, anxiety, and pent-up criticism. Some of those responses were directed toward the ministerial staff, some toward lay leadership, and some appeared to be general feelings of stress in the present moment and concerns about the future. No clear "way forward" emerged from this particular consultation, but for us it led to a renewed desire to explore more and better ways to facilitate "lines of communication" in our church.

In closing, we referred to William Lyons's document, "Tools for Transition," and particularly this line: "The adaptive challenge for congregational revitalization is not programmatic, but rather cultivating the 'capacity to understand and live in an environment that is no longer experienced as stable, predictable or even comprehensible.'" While our impulse is to offer "fixes" to problems in communication or structure, leaders like our own Erin Gilmore caution that quick fixes that neglect the deeper issues are likely to fail. Lyons stresses that the "invisible parts of an organization. . . are essential to organizational health and sustainability," namely information, relationships, and identity. I hope we can work, above all, on nurturing those three qualities.